

## **Intro**

This morning we're at Jesus' coming. A sharp contrast. Two destinies. We're either a sheep or a goat.

In 1979 the rock band AC/DC released a song called "Highway to Hell." The song's a cultural icon, featured prominently in the first Iron Man movie and recent commercials. The album's sold 7 million copies. AC/DC speaks of hell as "party time my friends are gonna be there too." They even use the words "I'm on my way to the promised land."

Maybe you've heard a friend or family member joke about how they'll party with friends in hell? Is this what hell is going to be like?

Let's see what Jesus says about his coming and the judgment that will accompany it.

## **READ PASSAGE**

## **PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

- Jesus is elaborating on what will happen when he comes at the end of the age.
- Points one and two quite long. Point three some length. Points four and five rather brief.

### **Point 1: Jesus is coming again to assign eternal destinies**

#### **Explanation**

What happens when Jesus returns? Our passage tells us.

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. – 25:31-32*

At that time, Jesus will sit on his throne and execute judgment. Every nation will be present.

The separation of people = every person = every individual ever born. This presupposes everyone has been resurrected. Exactly what we find in John.

*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. – John 5:28-29*

*all who are in the tombs* = the dead. *resurrection of life* and *resurrection of judgment* = everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike. *an hour* = a certain point in time, not a literal 60 minutes; both resurrections occur at the same time. *his voice* = "the voice of the Son of God" (John 5:25).

When Jesus returns, every one of us will stand before Jesus for judgment. We'll either be resurrected to life or to judgment. We'll either be designated a sheep (life) or a goat (judgment). The point is separation.

One group enters the eternal kingdom. One group is excluded. This all happens at the end of the age, the time when Jesus returns.

**Eternal life** = blessing, entrance into final kingdom of God prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

The new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21-22. A place where God himself will dwell with us (Rev 21:1-3). A place where death and mourning and crying and pain will cease (Rev 21:4). A place where the curse will be undone (Rev 22:3). Never sinned against again, never suffering from chronic pain or any other physical ailment, no more grief over our own sins.

Eternal = a duration of time that is unending and without end.

**Eternal punishment** = cursed, exclusion from that kingdom of God and entry into “*the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” 25:41. What the book of Revelation calls the lake of fire. Punishment that continues forever and ever.

There’s a basic eschatology scheme here: Jesus returns → resurrection of the just and unjust → final judgment → eternal destinies fixed → that’s it

*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. <sup>4</sup> Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. <sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering- <sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, **when** the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> **when he comes on that day** to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. – 2 Thess 1:3-10*

- 1) Believers experience affliction in the present age.
  - 2) Relief for the church comes when Jesus is revealed from heaven.
  - 3) Relief for the church coincides with Jesus’ vengeance on the unbelieving, which involves eternal destruction separated from God’s presence in heaven.
- state of unending existence characterized by ruin (destruction)
    - 4) Judgment *on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus* occurs at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.
  - Our relief comes through Jesus’ judgment. Salvation through judgment. Like the rescue of the Israelites in Egypt.
    - 5) Relief coincides with entry into God’s eternal kingdom = the new heavens and new earth.
  - Per Matthew 25:31-46 destinies become fixed when Jesus comes.

## **To the non-Christian**

The punishment in hell is qualified by the word eternal. Punishment that continues forever and ever. Eternal conscious torment (Rev 14:9-11; 21:8; 22:11, 15). Weeping and gnashing of teeth. Sorrowful loss like a funeral. Teeth grinding because of suffering experienced.

Why such a horrific punishment for sin? Because God is infinitely glorious and he is the one we sin against. Hell is a place to be avoided at all costs. The threat of hell calls us to change our stance towards God. To turn from rebellion or indifference to trust and devotion.

Jesus has furnished proof of his claims by rising from the dead! Are you ready for his return?

Perhaps you're asking yourself, how do I move from a goat to a sheep? From eternal punishment to eternal life? Again a changed stance towards God. Our problem is that God is holy and we're not. God holds us to the standard of his own character. When we sin = break God's law, we place ourselves under God's punishment. We're guilty and we need pardon. How can rebellious lawbreakers be pardoned?

Jesus died as a substitute for sinners such that if we repent and believe our rebellion is pardoned and we're reconciled to God. If we turn from rebellion to trust, Jesus' righteousness (perfect, sinless life) is credited to our account. And the punishment our sins deserve was taken by Jesus. We become a sheep. If we persist in rebellion, we experience the punishment ourselves. We remain a goat.

Become a sheep!

## **To the Christian**

Look forward to the promises. Relief is coming. One day you won't be said to be on the wrong side of history. History is moving toward the day when the saints will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom. Cling to Christ.

## **Point 2: Our treatment of Christians reveals conversion or unbelief**

### **Explanation**

Maybe you were thinking this message was going to be all about caring for the poor or doing prison ministry. Nothing wrong with that. We could establish these concerns from other passages. But that's not Jesus' point here. Jesus' point is that our treatment of his followers reveals where we stand with God.

Where do I get this? The hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned are said to be "*the least of these my brothers.*" In Matthew, Jesus' brothers are his followers, Christians.

*But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"<sup>49</sup> And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"<sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.* – Matt 12:48-50

Matthew 10:17-18 speaks of the experience of Jesus' apostles:

*Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues,<sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.* – Matt 10:17-18

That's imprisonment. Paul's experience for example.

## Imprisonment in NT times

- 1) Poor ventilation resulted in suffocating heat and dehydration.
- 2) Slept on the floor or pallets if available and used their outer cloak to keep warm.
- 3) Sleep was hindered by chains and stocks.
- 4) Chains resulted in chafed and corroded skin and even exhaustion and crippling if heavy chains.
- 5) Most prisons had very little light so essentially lived in darkness.
- 6) Prisons provided only enough food for bare survival resulting in poor health.
- 7) Prisons were places of appalling filth and unhealthy conditions.
- 8) Lighter confinement might allow for public bathing.
- 9) Haircuts were denied for fear of prisoners getting the barber's knife.
- 10) Torn clothing and bodily injury was common because flogging preceded confinement.
- 11) Many prisoners wished themselves dead and sought suicide.
- 12) Because of these conditions (hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned), Christians in prison required help of fellow believers on the outside for food or drink or clothing.
- 13) In a shame and honor culture, being a prisoner was shameful. To visit an imprisoned believer was to risk one's reputation so there was pressure to neglect prisoners.

The point is plain and simple. The sheep care for Jesus' suffering brothers.

How many of you are familiar with the Christian recording artist Keith Green? **[pause]** His songs "There Is a Redeemer" and "O Lord, You're Beautiful" appear in our hymn book. He was a pioneer of contemporary Christian music and was known for being a bit radical. Displaying passion for overseas missions and calling his audiences to repentance and whole-hearted commitment to Jesus. Tragically he died on July 28, 1982 in a plane crash. He recorded a song based on today's passage called "The Sheep and the Goats", largely consisting of the actual Bible words. Here's how the song ends:

"And my friends, the only difference between the sheep and the goats,  
According to this scripture,  
Is what they did, and didn't do!!"

Jesus says, "*you will recognize them by their fruits*" (Matt 7:20). Paul says, "*Let no one deceive you with empty words*" (Eph 5:6). James says, "*faith apart from works is dead*" (Jas 2:26). John says:

*By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. – 1 John 3:10*

Jesus assumes faith results in works: care for mistreated Christians. The theological foundation behind this assumption is the new birth. The Holy Spirit changes hearts when he indwells them. The relational foundation behind this is faith. Faith trusts and treasures God resulting in a love for his people.

We're saved because Jesus took the punishment in our place and his righteousness is credited to our account. But God saves us to make us a new creation!

## Application

The way we relate to Christian people reveals whether or not we are Christians ourselves. No concern for Jesus' brothers = not a Christian.

### **Point 3: We're united to Christ**

#### **Explanation**

The sheep are shocked by Jesus' revelation. We never fed or clothed you.

*And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* – 25:40

Little did they know when they cared for Jesus' suffering disciples they were actually caring for Jesus. Jesus is so closely and intimately bound with his followers that he can say when we're treated well or poorly he's being treated well or poorly.

#### **Illustration**

My brother visited last year. We had an altercation that illustrates this concept. Within ten minutes of his arrival, one his boys was doing wrestling moves on Luke on the trampoline. Putting Luke on his back in a fireman's carry and dumping Luke on his neck. I was outraged. Because I am so intimately bound with Luke that I care what happens to him.

I proceeded to yell at my nephew. My brother took offense. Because he was intimately bound to his son. He didn't want his son being yelled at.

#### **Application**

Jesus really cares what happens to us. We are his brothers and sisters.

*And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"<sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."* – Acts 9:4-5

Paul was persecuting Christians which meant he was persecuting Jesus.

#### **Doctrine**

This is the doctrine of union with Christ.

- 1) United to Christ in that his death, burial, and resurrection are credited to our account (Rom 6:3-5).
- 2) United to Christ in that he indwells us (Gal 2:20).
- 3) United to Christ in a reconciled relationship (John 10:27).
- 4) United to Christ in the bond between us.

What's done to us is done to him. As Jesus' brothers and sisters, we matter immensely to him. If we believe, what's our identity? Brother of Jesus. Sister of Jesus. Family.

#### **Point 4: Christianity is lived in community**

Who cares for Jesus' imprisoned brothers? Fellow believers. What does that assume? Relationships between fellow believers. Christians who know what's going on in the lives of their brothers. Christians that do more than consume. They serve. What's the structure God created to bring believers together in fellowship and service and mission? The local church.

This concept is reflected in our church covenant:

*We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.*

Local churches exist to facilitate commitment to one another.

#### **Point 5: Our time and money needs to be stewarded**

What needs to happen for this sort of care for imprisoned and suffering brothers to take place? Alleviating hunger, thirst, nakedness, and sickness would appear to require time and money. One needs to purchase what another lacks and one needs to take time to purchase those things and deliver them. Same with welcoming strangers and visiting prisoners.

It's a question of what we value. Do we value alleviating the suffering of fellow believers?

#### **Conclusion**

**Jesus is coming again to assign eternal destinies.** Am I a sheep or a goat?

**Our treatment of Christians reveals conversion or unbelief.** What does my life reveal?

**We're united to Christ.** Christian, do you know how treasured you are?

**Christianity is lived in community.** Know your brothers and sisters.

**Our time and money needs to be stewarded.** What do I value?