

## The Throne of Glory

Matt. 25:31-46

When you think about heaven, what do you think it will be like? All kinds of questions and thoughts are possible. Some of our ideas are naturally wrong-headed and I don't know that we pay very close attention to the little bit of information that we have about the next life. I can remember thinking about this question when I was a child. I loved sports then and so given that we will be perfect in heaven, I was thinking about what it would be like to play basketball in heaven. As a perfect basketball player I would never miss but then everyone else in heaven would also be perfect and so they would also never miss. But how can you play a game if no one ever misses? So, I thought, maybe we don't get to play basketball in heaven...

In the story of responsibility, when the employer returns from his long journey and the employee with whom he had left 5 million dollars reports that he has doubled his employers investment, the employer responds, "You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." Most of us would not think of having responsibility for the wise investment of 5 Million dollars as a little thing, but Jesus did. Even more significant though is the idea that Jesus regarded the coming responsibility associated with His coming as "many things" compared with the "few things" represented by the 5 Million. And we agreed that taking care of 5 million would be enough to keep anyone busy and engaged. It would be a full time job.

So what does ruling over many things mean to our eternity? Here is just one idea. I think that we usually think of heaven as a passive sort of existence. We will be at peace in the presence of the Lord. All of our needs will have been met. There will be no rent to pay in order to be able to enjoy the "place" that Jesus has gone to prepare for us. It is a picture of a life that is tranquil and passive. But the word of Christ, "I will make you rulers over many things..." disrupts this image. Ruling

over many things suggests activity, busyness, responsibility, energy, accountability, and possibly even tension and stress.

Setting this aside, Jesus continued His talk about being ready for His coming by describing the judgment of the sheep and the goats. The sheep are on the positive side of the judgment and the goats are on the negative side. In the description, Jesus hangs the outcome of the judgment on the question of the practice of compassion toward people who are in need.

Immediately, we want to be sure to say what we know that Jesus was not saying even though what He was not saying sounds a lot like what He did say. Jesus did not say that we are saved by being compassionate and helping poor people, but He did say that the saved are those who are compassionate and help poor people.

There is a very significant line of logic in the New Testament that supports what Jesus said. James made the point that the brother who says to the naked and hungry person, "Be warmed and filled," but does nothing to help that person has done nothing for that person. So compassion will be judged by what you do rather than by what you say. In the same way you can say that you know Christ but the real question is, what is it that you do that has demonstrated that you know Christ? Our actions speak louder than our words.

In 1 John, the apostle addresses the inconsistency evidenced by believers who have been taught to love one another, (this is both the old commandment and the new commandment that Jesus gave to His disciples) but who then carry resentments against and hate their Christian brothers. John concludes that the one who hates his brother is still in darkness and is not in the light (does not have a real experience of salvation) He asks, How can you say that you love God whom you have not seen when you hate your brother whom you have seen?

Remember that from the cross Jesus said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus forgave His enemies while they were still engaged in crucifying Him. This is the nature of God's love. This is the nature of Jesus' love for all people, good people and bad people. He loves all people. As in the story of the forgiven servant, to refuse to forgive is to place ourselves in opposition to God

in that we refuse to forgive someone whom He has already forgiven. If you refuse to love someone, you refuse to love a soul that Jesus died for.

When Peter preached at Pentecost He preached to the crowd in Jerusalem, just 50 days after the fact, who had crucified Jesus. He pleaded with that crowd to repent of their sin and receive God's gift of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit Who was manifesting Himself in the apostles and empowering Peter's own message. Peter's message was inclusive and drew no lines between those who cried "crucify Him" and those who cringed and wept over the loss of their Savior.

So, make no mistake. We cannot isolate an experience of profession of faith from the substance of the faith we profess. Christians are people who have received God's gift of salvation through Christ and who look like and believe like and act like Christians.

There is one more point to notice. This is the act of Jesus' identification with the hungry and thirsty, the strangers and the naked, the sick and those in prison. These are each descriptions of specific sufferings endured by humanity. In some cases these sufferings are self-inflicted. In some cases they are the tragic outcomes of natural disasters or of wars that have nothing to do with those who might innocently lose everything. "I was hungry and you gave Me food..." "When were you hungry and how did we give you food?" "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren you did it unto Me."

"I was hungry and you gave Me no food..." "When did we see You hungry and give You no food?" "Inasmuch as you did not do it unto one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."

Imagine your best friend tragically dying and leaving behind an orphan child. What would you do? If there was no relative there to care for the child and if your best friend had said to you, if something happens to me, will you take care of my child? What would you do? By caring for the child would you not be expressing your love and loyalty toward your best friend? Isn't this all that Jesus has asked of us in respect to the needy around us? What is your answer to Him?

Will your answer put you among the sheep or the goats?