

The Sheep and the Goats

***“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”
—Matthew 25:34***

THE PARABLE OF THE

sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46) is the conclusion of Jesus' reply to his disciples' question pertaining to the signs of his return and Second Presence. (chap. 24:3) “When the Son of Man shall come in his glory,” are the opening words of the parable, and they clearly establish it to be one of the signs of his presence, or *parousia*, as it is in the Greek text.

The coming of the Son of Man in “glory” is in contrast with his First Advent, which was in humiliation and suffering. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he announced that “all power” had been given to him “in heaven and in earth.” (chap. 28:18) He was then exalted to the right hand of “the throne of God.” (Heb. 1:3; 12:2) It is this divine, glorified Jesus who returns for the ultimate purpose of establishing his kingdom for the blessing of all people.

The signs of the Master's Second Presence do not all appear at once, just as the signs of his First Presence did not all occur at the same time. First, upon his return, Jesus reckons with and rewards his servants, his disciples. These enter into his joy, and are made joint-heirs with him. (Rom. 8:16-18) Thus, in presenting the final sign of his presence—The parable of the sheep and the goats—Jesus specified that his angels—his servants, or messengers—would be with him. This is in fulfillment of Jesus' promise that his faithful followers would sit with him in his throne.—Rev. 3:21

ALL NATIONS

With the faithful overcomers of the Gospel Age exalted to glory, and with Jesus on his throne, the divine plan of redemption and restoration moves into its final phase, which is the offering of restitution to "all the families of the earth." The parable states that the people of all nations are gathered before him.

It is well to guard against endeavoring to understand this parable too literally. The people of all nations will not be gathered before the throne of Christ's glory in the sense of all being assembled in one vast field, or area, with the goats herded to the left of the field and the sheep to the right. The thought is, rather, that the people of the whole world will be taken into active consideration by the Great Judge of all, and that, through the agencies of his kingdom, he will deal with them for their development with the intent of determining their worthiness or unworthiness of everlasting life.

We are informed that this judgment day will be a time when the people will learn righteousness. (Isa. 26:9) However, those who are evil at heart, and willfully persist in continuing in the way of disobedience, will not learn righteousness in that “land of uprightness,” nor will they “behold [recognize] the majesty of the LORD.” (vs. 10) These are the ones in the parable who are represented by the goats.

DOMINION RESTORED

The “kingdom” mentioned in our theme text, which the sheep class are informed that they are to inherit, is the same as stated in Genesis 1:26-28. It is man’s dominion over the earth which is the kingdom that was lost because of sin. The ultimate purpose of Christ’s Return and Second Presence is the restoration of man to life and to his lost dominion. Peter stressed this point when he said that “the heaven” received Jesus until “the times of restitution of all things, which,” he added, “God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:19-21

The “all things” to be restored to those of the human race who prove worthy, include life as well as the lost dominion. The parable states that the sheep class enters into life eternal. Jesus made provision for this at his First Presence by dying on Calvary’s cross, “the just for the unjust.”—I Pet. 3:18

SINNERS DESTROYED

God is unchangeable, and the “wages,” or punishment, for sin will always be death. (Rom. 6:23) The “goats” of the parable represent the

incorrigibly wicked during the world's coming judgment day. These hear the sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."—Matt. 25:41

Fire is used in the Bible as a symbol of destruction. Everlasting fire would be everlasting destruction. In verse 46, it is described as "everlasting punishment." Peter speaks of this punishment as being "destroyed from among the people."—Acts 3:23

To the sheep class of the parable, the King said, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." (Matt. 25:35,36) The "sheep" are surprised at this, and inquire when they had rendered all these good services.

The King's reply to their inquiry states, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (vs. 40) The expression, "these my brethren," denotes that the King is speaking of those there on the scene. These will be the people of the restored world of mankind at the close of the thousand-year judgment day.

While Jesus will be instrumental in awakening the dead world of mankind from the sleep of death, and in restoring the willing and obedient to human perfection, the Heavenly Father will become the Father of the restored world of mankind when the kingdom is turned over to him at the close of the Millennium. He is also Jesus' Father. From this standpoint the "sheep" will be the least of Jesus'

brethren, while his followers of the present age, exalted to divine glory with him, will be the greatest.

The "sheep" of the parable demonstrate their worthiness of everlasting life by their loving interest in, and solicitude for, those about them. Hunger, thirst, loneliness, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment, symbolize a fairly complete cross section of human needs. The "sheep" sense these needs of their fellows, and do what they can about them. It becomes part of their character to do this, and they do not realize that they are performing deeds so pleasing to the King. They learn and practice the way of love, and at the end discover that they are worthy of inheriting the dominion of earth which our first parents forfeited through their disobedience to divine law.

The "goats," on the other hand, do not display the qualities of divine love. Their outlook is entirely selfish, so they do not enter into the spirit of the kingdom, and do not cooperate with the kingdom agencies for the general welfare and blessing of the people. They do not learn righteousness, and continue in the evil ways of the selfish world in which they had formerly lived. Consequently, they are cut off from life.

Jesus is the great King referred to in the parable. He is the one who, together with his joint-heirs—the church class of the present age—will administer the just and righteous laws of the kingdom period, man's judgment day. We know that there will be no misjudging of the people. No mistakes will be made. Concerning the King who will sit upon "the throne of his glory," the prophet Isaiah wrote, "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest

upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; . . . and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth [the Truth], and with the breath of his lips [a decree of condemnation] shall he slay the wicked [the goat class of the parable]. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—Isa. 11:2-5

With the work of the judgment day complete, the purpose of Christ’s Return and Second Presence will have been fully accomplished. This work will be the final sign of his *parousia*. Many of the earlier signs of the Master’s presence are already visible, but this final sign is still future. It will not appear until all the true followers of Jesus have proved their worthiness to live and reign with him, and are exalted in the first resurrection to sit with him on the throne of his glory.—Rev. 20:6

With joy, the sheep of the parable will join in the proclamation, “Say among the heathen [the Gentiles] that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”—Ps. 96:10-13 ■