



NG Study Guide: Matt. 25:31-46 “The King Judges The Nations” [7.30.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** *Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Jesus foretells the day in which He will return and judge the nations (all people) as either being righteous or unrighteous. While the righteous receive eternal life, the unrighteous will receive eternal punishment. In order to be judged righteous in God’s eyes and be given eternal life, you must receive the righteousness of Christ. When you are righteous in Christ, it is revealed in your outward actions and your love of others as you seek to walk in the righteousness Jesus has given to you.

Context: Jesus has just finished discussing the signs of His return in Matthew 24, followed up by an encouragement to be sure of our salvation (parable of the wise and foolish virgins), and to remain faithful (parable of the talents). Now, Jesus is going to discuss the Final Judgement that will occur when He returns.

I. The forthcoming Judgement (v.31-33)

A. Jesus will occupy the seat of a glorified Judge (v.31-32)

Jesus begins this passage by describing a scene in which He will be seated on a glorious throne, passing judgement over all of the nations. Jesus says that this will occur when He “returns in glory”, in other words at His Second Coming. The Greek notion of nations implies “people groups”, and therefore in this scene, Jesus is judging all people as individuals. These people will be divided into two groups, which

Jesus likens to a shepherd dividing sheep from goats. The “sheep”, who are placed to the right represent the people God deems as righteous. The “goats” on the left are deemed unrighteous. Everyone who stands before God will fit into one of these two categories.

B. Jesus alone determines who is righteous and who is wicked (v.33)

After Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, we are told Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God and given all authority in heaven and on earth (Phil 2:9-11). In Hebrew tradition, the role of perfect Judge was reserved for God alone, and thus this image of Jesus acting as Judge displays His divinity. Because Jesus is perfect and has all authority, He is completely fit to occupy the position of Judge. Often times, we are quick to judge one another and we want to see justice served on our terms. The problem is, that no one on earth has the right to judge another for their sin because we are all guilty of sin. Only Jesus has the authority to forgive sin and to punish sin because He himself is the only sinless one.

Q1: How does knowing that Jesus is the only perfect Judge affect the way you view other people?

II. The judgement of the righteous (v.34-40)

Jesus begins with the discussion of what will happen to those “on His right”, which are those who are judged righteous.

B. The righteous will inherit life in God’s eternal kingdom (v.34)

We are told that the righteous will *inherit* God’s eternal kingdom. In Hebrew culture, inheritance was based upon birthright and identity. You had the right to inherit money or possessions that belonged to your family name as they were passed down through the generations. In other words, your identity entitled you to your inheritance. When we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are born again (John 3). In this new birth, we receive the righteousness of Jesus and the new identity that comes along with it. In doing so, we also are given a new inheritance, part of which is eternal life with God.

B. Inward righteousness is displayed in outward behavior (v.35-40)

Here, Jesus gives a list of actions that characterize the righteous. It’s important to understand that righteousness doesn’t come from good works, but rather from faith in Jesus. Those who have faith in Jesus will naturally display qualities of love and care for others, *even those who society may deem the least desirable*. Notice how Jesus responds to the loving actions of a righteous person; it is though those good deeds had been done directly to Jesus Himself. When we love others, out of a love for God with the right heart, God receives that as personal worship of Him. If someone is failing to demonstrate love for God and others as described in v.35-40, it could be for several reasons. Number one, it could be that they aren’t truly saved as they haven’t actually yielded their lives to Jesus. Sadly, there are many out there who convince themselves that they know Jesus when they actually don’t. Number two, it could be that the person has saving faith, but is choosing to neglect obedience to God. Neglecting to obey God is often due to a quenching of the Holy Spirit because of active rebellion or, more often, distraction with the things of the world.

Q2: What are some distractions that prevent you from loving God and loving others?

III. The judgment of the wicked (v.41-46)

After discussing the fate of those God deems as righteous, Jesus turns to discussing the consequences of those individuals who are judged to be wicked.

C. The wicked will face eternal punishment apart from God (.v.41)

The people who are deemed to be wicked are asked to depart from Jesus. Because of their failure to put their faith in Jesus, they can never obtain righteousness because righteousness apart from Christ is impossible. Since Jesus is perfectly righteous, only the righteous can inherit His kingdom and dwell with Him in eternity. The unrighteous are subjected to the due consequence of their sinful rebellion, which is the same eternal punishment. It's important to realize that God does not desire for people to go to hell. Hell was prepared as a punishment for the Satan and his demons. However, those who choose to reject Jesus (and therefore reject righteousness) will be accountable for all their sin at the judgement. God makes righteousness freely available through Christ. Anyone who confesses and believes in Jesus is judged righteous and is spared from this eternal punishment.

B. Outward disobedience of God reveals a lack of righteousness (v.42-46)

Jesus details how a lack of righteousness in someone's life will manifest itself in a lack of loving actions towards others. It's not that the unrighteous will be punished because they failed to do good works. Indeed, there are plenty examples of secular organizations and non-believers who perform "good works" (i.e. charities, recovery organizations). However, Matthew 7:21-23 makes it very clear that performance is not sufficient for attaining the righteousness needed for salvation. Only those who have yielded their lives to Jesus and have received His righteousness can perform good works as an **act of worship towards God**. The unrighteous are punished because they failed to recognize their need for Jesus, repent and believe in Him. This rejection of Jesus is visible as a lack of good and loving works done in Jesus' name.

iv. Righteousness in Christ leads to love for God & others (v.44-46)

Just as Jesus receives loving actions towards others as love to Himself, a lack of loving actions towards others reveals a lack of love for God in the heart of a person. Many times, even Christians who know Jesus struggle to show love the way God calls them to. This is usually due to misplaced or misaligned affections. As Christians, our utmost affections should be for Jesus. However, we are often times not in love enough with Jesus, or too in love with the cares and passions of this world. It is important that we realign ourselves to love Jesus above all else. It is then that our love for Him is revealed in love for others, and we truly experience the deep satisfaction Jesus wants to bring us in both this life and in eternity.

Q3: How can we remind ourselves and others that righteousness is not achieved on the basis of performance?

Q4: What are some ways we can we realign our hearts with God so that our love for Him is revealed in love for others?

Conclusion: As we consider the judgement, it can be tempting to look at the world and wonder why God hasn't already judged the wicked. It can be difficult to witness the world in its present state with evil so

rampant. Perhaps, even you yourself have been the victim of this wickedness. It's important to remember that no wicked deed will go unpunished. For those who know Jesus, those sins were judged at the Cross. The *Judge Himself* suffered and took the punishment for our sin so we could attain righteousness. We must realize God is not lax in his judgement of sin but is graciously waiting, giving people time to recognize and accept their need for Jesus. For those who don't know Jesus, the time is now to believe in Him and receive His righteousness. For those who do know Jesus, it's time to walk in the righteousness that He has given you and show love to Him by loving others.

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Get outside in your neighborhood. Try to walk the dog, take a walk or visit the community pool during peak times & be intentional about introducing yourself and getting to know people.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

3. Feel free to use an icebreaker question or activity to get to know one another better.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.