

Episode #927 Matthew 25 Part 5-Reward and Punishment

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord was continuing His discourse regarding His Parousia and the consummation of the eon. After giving two parables regarding that time, He now sets forth literally an event that will take place at that time.

III. The Sheep and Goat Nations. Matthew 25:31-46.

- A. Verse 35. “Gave Me food...gave Me drink” is more “you gave Me to eat...you gave me to drink.” A “stranger” means literally a foreigner. “Took me in” is *sunago*, related to the word for synagogue. “You assembled together with Me.”
- B. Verse 36. “Naked” is the Greek *gumnos*, where we get our word “gymnasium” from, literally meaning a place where you exercise naked! But that is no longer the custom. As Bullinger points out, this could also include poorly clothed, “half-naked,” as we would say. “Clothed Me” is “you put (clothing) on Me.” “Visited Me” is “you looked after Me.” “In prison” is literally “under guard.”
- C. Verse 37. “Feed You” or nourished You. Notice that they use different language than He did, rather than “gave You food.”
- D. Verse 38. In these cases they repeat His words back to Him quite exactly. They do not at all remember doing these things for Him!
- E. Verse 39. Notice that they combine “sick” and “in prison” and only the response “come to You,” ignoring the “looked after You” of the sick. They still have no recollection of doing any of these things!
- F. Verse 40. “The King” is, of course, the Son of Man, Christ Himself. “Assuredly, I say to you” is the Lord’s solemn affirmation, *amen* I say to you. “Least” is the smallest in size, amount, importance, authority, estimation, or rank. Notice that here we have a third party: the brethren. These brethren are not the sheep nations, for they are not rewarded for treating themselves well! These brethren would be those who had been rulers among His people of Israel, who were scattered far and wide and persecuted during the rebellion against the kingdom. Did these nations succor and support them? Yes! That is why they are rewarded.
- G. Verse 41. Depart or “go,” in contrast with “come” to the sheep nations.
 1. Cursed or doomed, as in “pronounced doomed.”
 2. “Everlasting” is eonian, meaning outflowing. People have the idea that everlasting fire would be a fire you would put something into and it would burn forever. But that is not the case. Eonian fire is a fire that flows on and on, burning unstopably, until all that there is to be burned is burned up. This is what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, Jude 1:7. They are not still burning.
 3. “Prepared” or made ready. Notice that this was not at all prepared for men, but for the devil and his angels. Eonian fire is a supernatural thing. Note that this eonian fire is not prepared for them to rule over it (!), but for them to find their final punishment in it. Satan is not and never has been the “lord of hell,” though until Christ defeated him he held the keys of death and Hades. But Hades is not the lake of fire, which is prepared for his destruction, not his dominion.

- H. Verse 42. This is “you did not give me something to eat, you did not saturate Me (with drink),” an exact parallel with verse 35 except the word “not” or *ouk* added in.
- I. Verse 43. “Stranger...take in, naked...clothe” are again parallels with verses 35 and 36 with the word *ou* or “not” added in. The Lord combines “sick” and “in prison” differently than in verse 36. “Sick” here is an adjective rather than a verb, as in verse 36, instead of “I was sick,” this just reads “sick.” “You did not visit Me” is again “you did not look after Me,” not the “came to Me” of in prison, which is omitted here. Notice that this is the opposite of what the sheep omitted in verse 39.
- J. Verse 44. In verse 37, “the righteous” (nations) answered Him. It is just “they.” There is no characterization of them here, yet. “Hungry...thirsty...stranger...naked...sick... in prison,” they combine all six together, with only one response. “Minister” sums up all six responses that the Lord mentioned in this one word, *diakoneo*, from which we get our word “deacon.” One could make this “minister,” but the idea is to serve. To feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, assemble with the foreigner, clothe the naked, watch over the sick, and visit the prisoner are all forms of service.
- K. Verse 45. Again the Lord’s solemn affirmation, *amen* I say unto you. The major difference between the sheep and the goats is the sheep served, and the goats did not serve. It is not that the goats persecuted, harmed, or attacked. They just failed to serve, but left His brethren well enough alone. Notice that “My brethren” is left out here, but we can certainly supply it from earlier. The “least of these” is not just any needy person we might happen to want to help. Not that it is not good to help the needy, but visiting the gross criminal in prison is not visiting the Lord Jesus Christ, etc. In that day, certain men will stand as the outcalled of God, and they will be an extension of Jesus Christ because He has given of Himself to them. Whatever you do in regard to them therefore, you do it to Jesus Christ. Like He said to the twelve: “He who receives you receives Me,” Matthew 10:40. They were an extension of Himself.
- L. Verse 46. “And these will go into eonian restraint, but the righteous into life eonian.” The word is not punishment, but restraint. It does not appear many times in Scripture, but when it does it refers to restraint, not punishment. Notice that the rulers are already consigned to everlasting fire from the pronouncement of verse 41. But this does not mean every individual in that nation will go into everlasting fire! The nations themselves whose rulers acted this way are under eonian restraint. The righteous nations enter into life eternal. This is *zoen aionion*, indicating not just living forever, but living a bigger, fuller, greater life, LIFE in all capitals. Instead of continuing under restraint, these continue in abundance, which is the meaning of *zoen aionion*. See Matthew 19:16. “Life eonian” is by far the most common phrase for “eternal life,” “life eternal,” “everlasting life,” etc. Only rarely is it “eonian life” instead. The emphasis is on the LIFE, then the outflowingness. God’s *zoe* life is the greater life we look for.

IV. Conclusion: The Son of Man when He sits on His glorious throne will judge the nations on whether or not they fed, clothed, visited, and cared for even the least of His brethren. While many have applied this to the sick, poor, and imprisoned of our day, this has to do with Israelites in the kingdom of God, not our poor today, as good as caring for them is. The nations in His Parousia will be judged based on this. Do we likewise care for God’s people when they are in need?