

Heaven or Hell

Matthew 25:31-46 - NCBC, August 22, 2021

Main Point: **Your love for Jesus reveals your eternal destiny.**

- Are you a sheep or a goat? (31-33)
 - Sheep are placed on the right and favored
 - Goats are placed on the left and rejected
- Are you headed towards heaven or hell? (34, 41, 46)
 - Heaven is the blessed inheritance of eternal life
 - Hell is the cursed fire of eternal punishment
- Are you loving Jesus? (35-36, 42-43)
 - The proof of salvation is love for the Judge
 - The proof of damnation is no love for the Judge
- Are you loving Jesus' family? (37-41, 44-45)
 - Jesus and His followers are one.
 - Satan and His followers are one.

Application: **Call upon God's Spirit to increase your love for Jesus.**

- God's Spirit gives you spiritual life (John 3:5-8)
- God's Spirit helps you know God's love for you (1 John 4:7-19)
- God's Spirit bears the fruit of your love for others (Galatians 5:22-23)

Opening Announcements:

- **August is Life Group Signup Month!** Everyone is highly encouraged to join a life group for the good of your soul!

<<Glorious Day>>



The day of the Lord will be a day of great glory and awe. I pray we are all ready for that day, even as we turn our attention to our future eternity in **Matthew chapter 25, verses 31-46.**



Good morning to all of you! If you need a Bible, simply raise your hand and we will gladly give you one to use or take home as our gift to you today.

It would be very appropriate if we had a bunch of orange construction signs around here these days, because our God is working right now at New Castle Bible Church.

God is at work among us – in our heads, hearts, hands, and homes... all for His greater glory in central IL.

Thank you so much for your prayers as our elders and wives enjoyed a very special retreat this weekend. We had a great time, and we left very encouraged by our unity together. We plan to share more about our retreat takeaways (as well as some other exciting ministry updates) next Sunday evening, August 29th, at 6pm. So please plan to join us next Sunday evening for a very special Congregational Meeting at 6pm.

Now, before we read today's Scripture, I want to just add my encouragement to plug into one of our Life Groups this fall. We've set aside August to invite you to sign-up for a life group and get connected to biblical community.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of biblical community to your spiritual life. Your growth in holiness and perseverance in faithful living for Jesus is a community project.¹ That's so important, I want to say it again! Your spiritual growth is a community project! Wallflowers and spiritual lone rangers miss out on God's good design for their greater joy in Christ.

So please talk with one of our pastors or fill out a card in the hallway this week or next... because we don't want you to miss out on this opportunity to grow life-changing biblical friendships with other Christ-followers.



Now please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word, as I read the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse from the English Standard Version, from **Matthew 25, verse 31**. Today's Scripture is not a parable, but a prediction or promise from Jesus about what exactly will happen at His second coming. May God give us hearts that believe and heed this sober warning:

Matthew 25, starting in **verse 31**:

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 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. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then

¹ Hebrews 3:12-14, 10:24-25; c.f. Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:28-29

the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 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.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

These are Jesus' words. Please be seated.

Let's pray.

Today is Sunday. Suppose you knew you would die on Tuesday. You have two days to live, and tonight some of your closest friends are coming to spend time with you.

What would you tell them? What would you want to

² Matthew 26:2

³ Contra Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19

⁴ Matthew 24:3; c.f. Acts 1:6

make sure to talk about with your closest friends if you knew you only had 2 more days to live?

If you are Jesus, talking to your friends two days before your death on the cross, you talk to your friends about their eternal destiny. About heaven and hell.

For in fact, that's what's happening here in **Matthew chapters 24 and 25**. We call these two chapters the Olivet Discourse, since Jesus is giving this sermon to His disciples while sitting on the Mount of Olives. It is just two days before Passover.² And Jesus' mind is on the end times – when His second coming will usher in His rule as King on earth.

Remember the disciples didn't yet believe that Jesus would die.³ They were still asking how much longer until Jesus would reveal His glory and establish His earthly kingdom for Israel.⁴

And so Jesus reveals God's plan for His *second* coming ... which doesn't happen until *after* God gathers the church to Himself⁵ and judges the world in great tribulation.⁶ Jesus wants His disciples, and by extension, all people today, to be ready for His second coming.

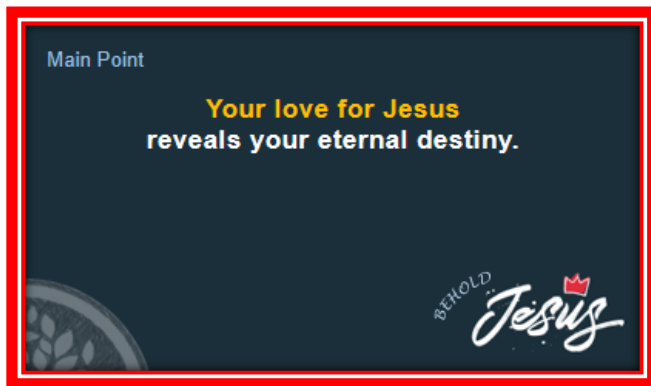
After all – Jesus' return to this earth will immediately and irreversibly seal the eternal destiny for every soul. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the time to repent of sin, and ready yourself to meet our coming Lord.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 7; 1 John 3:2

⁶ Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:4-28; Revelation 6-18

And so Jesus concludes the Olivet Discourse with a sobering picture of the coming judgment. When King Jesus returns to earth, His first act will be to judge souls, and separate all people into two different destinies.

Although it is sobering to consider God's judgment, the Scriptures before us today are of utmost importance for us to understand. And here's the main point:



Your love for Jesus reveals your eternal destiny.

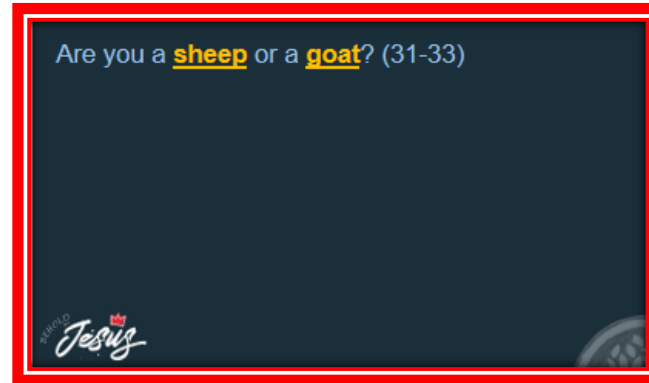
Whether you will end up in heaven or hell *then*, is revealed by your sincere love for Jesus *now*. Your love for Jesus will be evaluated by Jesus on judgment day. All who love Jesus will find themselves eternally blessed in heaven, and all who have no love for Christ will find themselves eternally cursed in hell.

Whether you love Jesus is of eternal importance for you!

So as we walk through this passage together, I'll ask four questions which help reveal your eternal destiny:

⁷ Daniel 7:13-14; c.f. Psalm 110:1; Revelation 5:9; 20:4-6
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First **verses 31-33** cause us to ask,



Are you a sheep or a goat? (31-33)

In the Ancient Near East, sheep and goats would often herd together ...but when it was time to feed or rest, a good shepherd would separate the sheep and the goats from each other. The sheep were docile and gentle, but the goats were unruly and aggressive. Everyone in Jesus' time knew that sheep and goats have completely different and contrary natures inside them.

And so, Jesus teaches in **verse 31**, that He, the Son of Man... Israel's promised Messiah according to **Daniel 7**,⁷ will not sit on His glorious throne to rule as Israel's king over the whole earth,⁸ until *after* He comes to earth a *second* time... in the fullness of glory, and with all the heavenly hosts accompanying Him.

The first time Jesus came to earth, the angels heralded His humble arrival in a manger which brought peace and

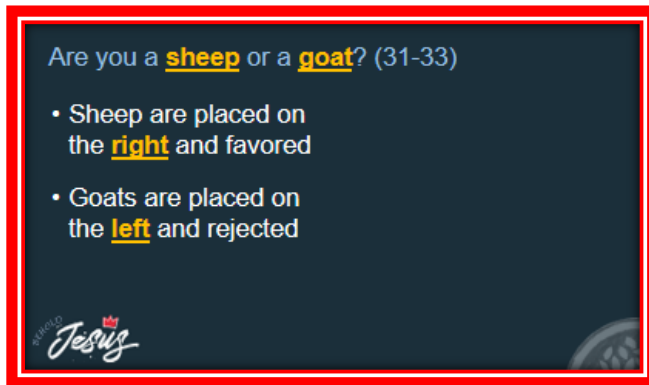
⁸ C.f. Isaiah 9:7; Luke 1:31-33

goodwill to men.⁹ But **verse 31** here reveals that the second coming of Jesus will not be humble at all.

Instead, Jesus will come in the fullness of **Ezekiel 1** and **Isaiah 6** glory.¹⁰ And instead of bringing peace and salvation, the second coming of Jesus will bring immediate vengeance on all who have rejected Him.¹¹

Verse 32 teaches how all the nations... every person still living on the earth at the end of the tribulation period, will be gathered in front of Jesus' throne in Jerusalem.¹² And Jesus' first act as king will be to decide who enters His millennial, earthly kingdom,¹³ and who is cast out of His kingdom.

Just like a Middle-eastern shepherd with his mixed herd of sheep and goats, Jesus will divide all the living into two separate groups. According to **verse 33**,



⁹ Luke 2:9-14

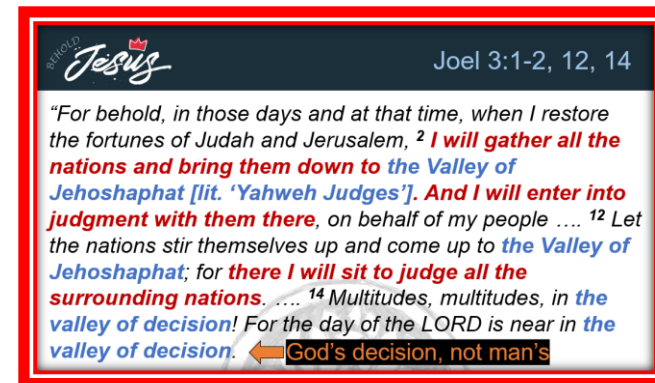
¹⁰ Isaiah 6:3; C.f. Zechariah 14, especially v. 5; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

¹¹ 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10

¹² The “Sheep and Goat Judgment” is different than the “Great White Throne Judgment” referred to in Revelation 20:11-15. This “Sheep and

Sheep are placed on His **right** and favored. Goats are placed on His **left** and rejected.

Joel chapter 3 offers more detail about this judgment.

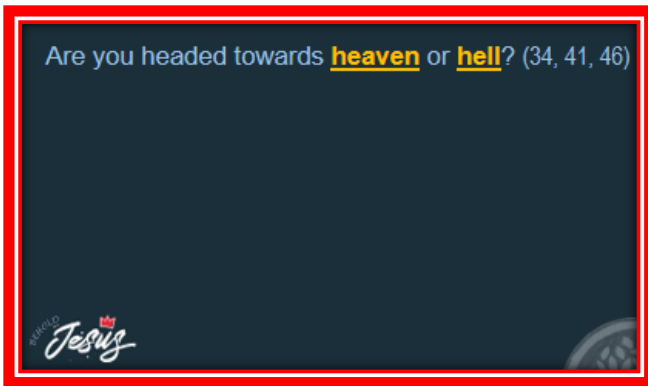


Joel 3 describes how Jesus will gather all the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which literally means the valley where “Yahweh Judges”. **Verse 14** calls this same valley the “valley of decision,” describing *multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision*.

So notice, this is not a place where people decide whether they will serve the Lord. This is a valley of *God’s* decision... it’s a valley where *God judges*... and decides,

Goat Judgment” occurs at the very beginning of the millennial kingdom, since the saved are told to “inherit the kingdom” (Mt. 25:34). The White Throne Judgment will take place after the 1000-year reign of Christ.

¹³ Revelation 20:1-7



Are you headed towards heaven or hell? Spiritual sheep, whom Jesus places on His right, are headed towards heaven. But spiritual goats, whom Jesus places on His left, are headed towards hell.

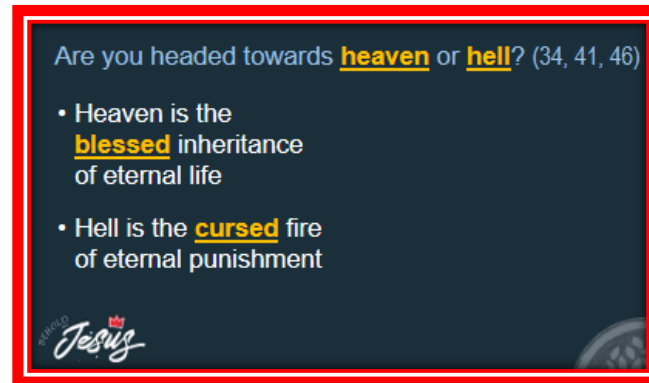
Now loved ones, there is no more sober topic to discuss than eternal judgment.

Yet as a Gospel minister I have a sacred responsibility to prepare you for your eternal destiny! And my love for you compels me to show you the stunning contrasts between the two destinies pictured in **verses 34, 41, and 46**.

Before the end of this sermon, I'm going to clearly tell you how you can know for sure whether you are headed towards heaven or hell. So honestly consider, "Are you headed towards heaven or hell?"

My own heart was moved with emotion this week as I studied the wonders of heaven and the horrors of hell. This is no laughing matter, nor is your eternal destination something you can put off to consider another day.

In **verse 34**, Jesus reveals that,



Heaven is the blessed inheritance of eternal life. Look at the end of **verse 46**, "the righteous enter into eternal life."

However, the contrast to this is seen in **verse 41** and the first part of **verse 46**, where Jesus' verdict for spiritual goats reveals Hell is the cursed fire of eternal punishment.

So when's the last time you seriously thought about the differences between heaven and hell?

Verse 34 is a joyful invitation into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus:

*Come... all who are weary...*¹⁴

You who are blessed by my Father ... noticed carefully... the invitation to enter God's kingdom does not go to those who have earned the kingdom...but to those whom the Father has blessed.

¹⁴ Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17

Sometimes, this part of the Olivet Discourse is misunderstood to teach that our works, or our service towards others, is what qualifies us or earns us entrance into God's kingdom. But this is not true!

Verse 34 clearly says the invitation to enter God's kingdom goes to those who have already been blessed by the Father... for only God qualifies a sinner to enter His heaven forever! Only God can bless a human soul with an eternal *inheritance*.

After all, an inheritance is not typically earned... it is only given to children according to the Father's will.

And so **verse 34** describes entering Jesus' kingdom as a blessed inheritance from the Father, that was ...underline this:

Prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Again, your inheritance of God's kingdom was not prepared for you after you showed mercy to others, or did a bunch of religious works, or cleaned up your life. Your kingdom inheritance of dwelling together with God forever in heaven was prepared by God for you *before the foundation of the world!* Before you were even born!!

Ephesians 1 teaches us that God *chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, {so} that we should be holy and blameless before Him.*¹⁵ And while this isn't a sermon focused on the sovereign grace of God's election, please acknowledge that **verse 34** clearly

shows that God's grace, not any human work, is what qualifies someone to enter God's kingdom.¹⁶

The end of **verse 46** refers to those on His right as the "righteous" who enter *eternal life!*

Heaven is the blessed inheritance of eternal life that is prepared in ages past for all those God favors!

O doesn't your soul yearn to receive such grace? Especially when we contrast this future glory with the future terrors of hell that are described in **verse 41**.

To those on His left, instead of saying "Come", He will say, *Depart from me...*¹⁷

Spiritual goats are expelled from God's kingdom. They are not blessed, but *cursed*...for hell is the polar opposite of all of heaven's rewards.

No kingdom inheritance...only *eternal fire*...

Now please consider this terrifying judgment.

Have you ever known anyone who has had to be treated in a burn center for 3rd or 4th degree burns?

Can you imagine the horror of continually burning forever... eternally... never being consumed... never being annihilated... but only continuing to writhe in the tongue-gnawing anguish of such eternal punishment?

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:4-11; c.f. John 17:24; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Peter 1:20-21

¹⁶ C.f. Ephesians 2:8-10

¹⁷ Reminiscent of Matthew 7:23

Now at this point, some question Jesus' goodness for sending anyone to such a horrific eternity.

But notice carefully in **verse 41**, the eternal fire of hell was not prepared for any human being... hell was prepared for who? *The devil and his angels*, right?

So reject any image of a horned creature with a pitchfork out of your mind. Satan does not rule hell. Satan will not be punishing anyone in hell! Hell is the eternal fiery place where Satan himself is tormented ... right alongside all those who followed Him.

Hell is for Satan and all who have chosen to willfully serve and love Satan¹⁸ instead of loving and serving God.

Verse 30 above reminds us that hell is a place of utter darkness.¹⁹ There's no light, no relationships with others, nothing but the sounds of weeping and gnashing of teeth²⁰ as sinners share in Satan's punishment forever.

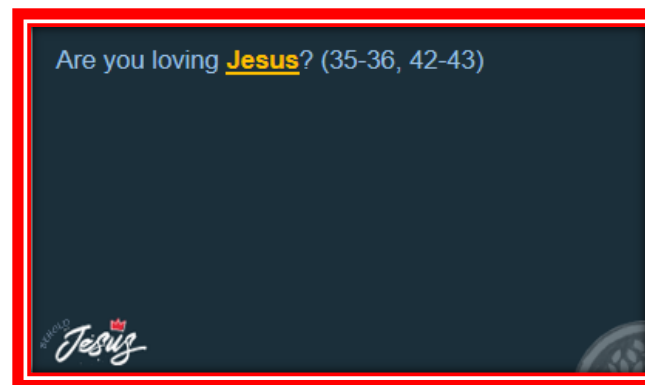
Look again at **verse 46**, and underline the word *eternal*. Hell is the cursed fire of eternal punishment.

Why would you ever resign yourself to going there, when today is a day of salvation, and God's Spirit is reaching out to you through this message for your repentance, faith, and love for Him?

After all, notice that after Jesus pronounces the verdict for both the righteous and the sinners, he offers the same supporting evidence for His verdict. Surprisingly, Jesus

points to people's love for Him as the proof of whether they were part of His kingdom or not.

So **verses 35-36** and **42-43** cause us to ask,



Are you loving Jesus?

How you love Jesus reveals your eternal destiny, so if you want to know for sure whether you are headed towards heaven or hell, just ask yourself, does my heart truly delight in knowing Jesus? Do I have genuine desire for Jesus which motivates me to enjoy Him and obey Him?

After all, both Peter and Judas publicly followed Jesus. Both did many mighty works. Both were respected by other Christians. But Peter loved Jesus and was saved,²¹ and Judas did not love Jesus and was lost.

Let's look at the text and see why this question is the main focus of Jesus' teaching here.

¹⁸ John 8:42-44; Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 John 3:8, 12; Jude 6; Revelation 12:9

¹⁹ Matthew 25:30

²⁰ Matthew 24:51

²¹ John 21:15-19

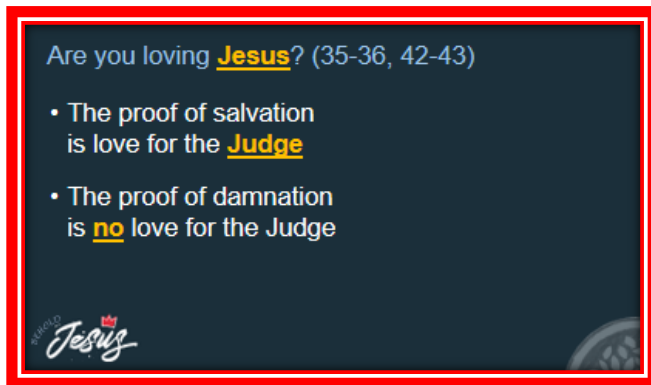
In **verse 34**, the Shepherd-King invites those with His Father's blessing into His kingdom, and offers as evidence for His verdict 6 representative ways these people had shown love to Him personally.

As you read **verse 34**, note the emphasis is more on the *who* than the *what*:

*For I was hungry, and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you clothed me,
I was sick and you visited me,
I was in prison and you came to me.*

In **verses 42-43**, the King repeats the failure of these same expressions of love as evidence for their damnation.

In other words, write this down:



²² Matthew 7:22

²³ Matthew 15:8; John 8:44; Romans 3:10-18, 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14, 12:3

²⁴ Isaiah 6:9-10; 53:6; 2 Timothy 2:26

The proof of salvation is love for the **Judge**. And the proof of damnation is **no** love for the Judge.

The proof that God has saved you by His grace... is not that you do many mighty works in Jesus' name, or cast out demons in Jesus' name, or preach powerful sermons in Jesus' name.²²

The proof, or evidence that testifies to your eternal destiny, is simply whether you love Jesus or not.

Listen carefully: sin so corrupts the human heart that, once a heart has tasted sin, it will never again love God.²³ All sinners will always love their own way.²⁴ Sin makes us enemies of the very God who created us to love Him.²⁵

Therefore, only God's rescuing grace is powerful enough to transform a heart on the inside from hating God, to loving God.²⁶ Only God's Spirit can cause us to be born again, so that we sincerely love Jesus, and thereby seek to serve Him however we can practically with our lives.

But notice, on judgment day, both the righteous and the wicked are shocked to have ever seen Jesus in need. In **verses 37** and **44** both groups ask Jesus the same question, "When?" "When did we ever see *you Lord*, in such practical need?"

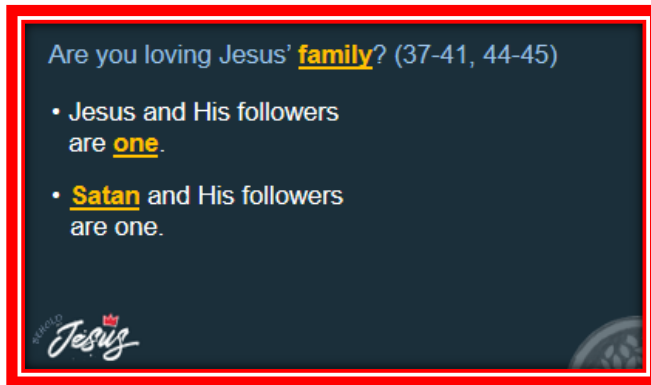
And Jesus answers both groups the same, doesn't He?

²⁵ Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21; 1 Corinthians 16:22; contra Ephesians 6:24

²⁶ Matthew 19:26, 22:37-40; Luke 10:25-37

Truly I say to you, as you did [or did not do it] to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Translation, Jesus so closely identifies with His people, that how you love God's people is truly how you love Jesus Himself. Which leads us to our last question,

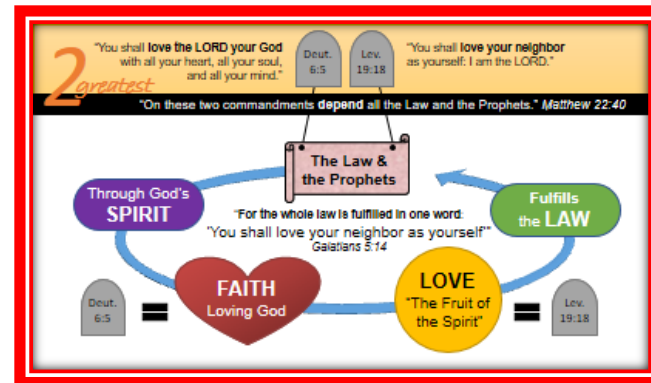


Are you loving Jesus' family?

Because after all, **Jesus and His followers are one**. And as we already learned in **verse 41**, **Satan and His followers are one**. So you can't say that you love Jesus, but not practically show mercy and compassion to Jesus' followers.²⁷

I suppose it's possible to love people, and not love Jesus. But it's biblically impossible for you to love Jesus and not love His people. Does that make sense?

This is why back in **Matthew chapter 22**,



we spent so much time trying to understand the relationship between our love for God (and fulfilling of the first commandment) and our love for our neighbors (the fulfilling of the second commandment).²⁸

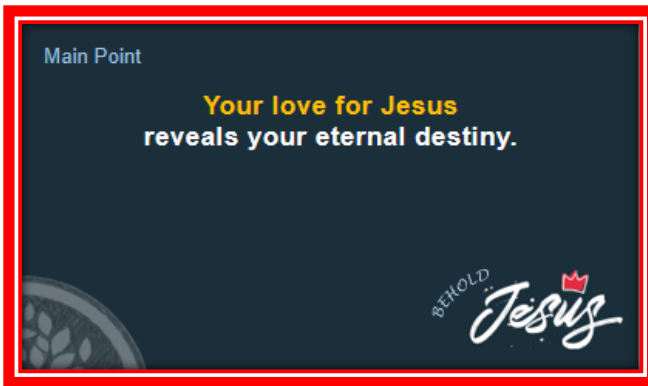
Because once God's Spirit grants you saving faith, for the first time in your life you will actually begin to love God.²⁹ And the evidence of God's Spirit transforming your life and transforming your love will be the fruit of the Spirit, which is love for your neighbor, or the fulfillment of righteousness revealed by God's law.

So don't miss Jesus' point at the end of the Olivet Discourse. This is not teaching us that our acts of mercy save us. Nor is this merely teaching that we need to go out and do more acts of mercy for the least of these among us, since it is possible for people to show mercy without loving Jesus. The weight of this Scripture is clearly on our love for Jesus... for only,

²⁷ James 2:14-26; 1 John 4:7-21; 5:1-5

²⁸ Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:14

²⁹ 1 Peter 1:8

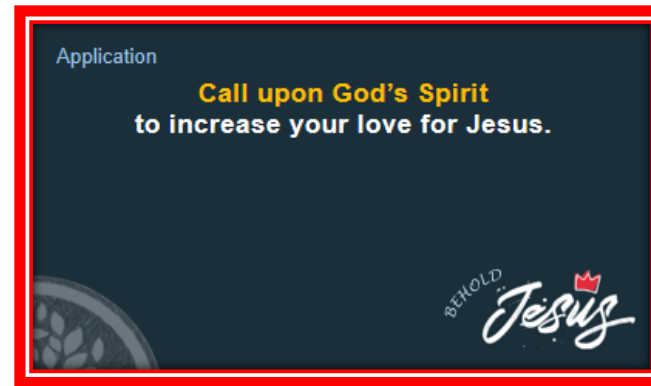


Your love for Jesus reveals your eternal destiny.

And wherever a soul is being refreshed by the fountainhead of God's love, there will always be many springs of compassion and mercy flowing out towards others.

So are you a sheep or a goat? Are you headed towards heaven or hell? You can only know by examining whether your soul loves Jesus. And such love for Christ is never proven with words...but rather by Spirit-produced works of compassion and mercy for even the least talented child of God.

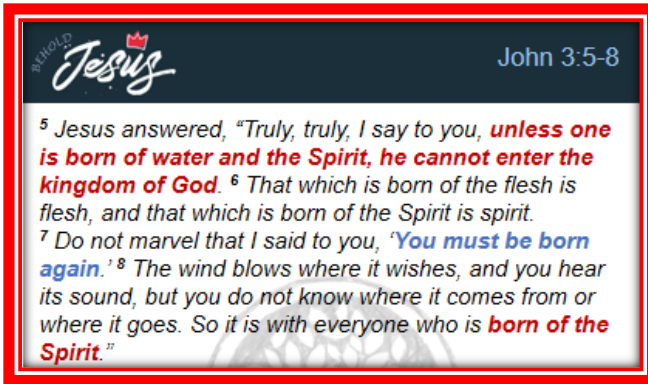
So the most important question for us now is simple: How can you cultivate your love for Jesus? How can I grow my sincere faith and delight of knowing Jesus?



Answer: **Call upon God's Spirit to increase your love for Jesus.** Because here's the good news: are you ready for some really good news?



God's Spirit gives you spiritual life. God's Spirit is able to replace the self-loving heart, with a heart of faith that truly loves God! Do you remember how Jesus taught this to Nicodemus in **John chapter 3?**



Only those who are born of the spirit can enter the kingdom of God. You must be born again.

Loved ones... don't confuse the means of loving people with the end of loving Jesus. We're talking today about the difference between eternal punishment and eternal life. This is about your love for God – this is about your love for the Kingly Judge! Call out to God's Spirit and ask God to increase your love for Him!

After all, according to **1 John 4**,



God's Spirit helps you know God's **love** for you.

³⁰ Luke 7:47

O this is so important! What fuels your love for God is your understanding of God's love for you! Only once you understand God's electing sovereign grace which has been lavished upon you to set you free from your prison of self-love...and transfer your destiny from hell to heaven... will you delight in knowing God yourself!

Love for God can never be forced. Rather it is the result of God's Spirit causing us to grow more and more in our understanding of God's love for sinners like us.

Remember, those who love much are those who realize they have been forgiven much!³⁰

So call upon God's Spirit to increase your love for Jesus,



Believing that God's Spirit bears the fruit of your **love** for others. Call upon God's Spirit, and submit to God's Spirit. Walk in the Spirit. Live under the control of God's Spirit. Surrender to God's Spirit and His Word at work within you,³¹ for the fruit of God's Spirit is love. And every soul that God's Spirit controls is growing in their practical daily expressions of mercy and compassion towards God's people.

³¹ Colossians 3:16

May God help all of us to increase our love for Him through the power of His Spirit... after all,



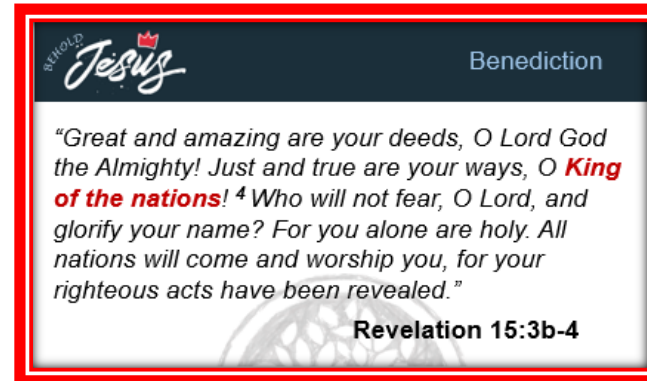
truly loving Jesus is the difference between heaven or hell.

Let's pray.

<<Glorious Day>>

<<Promote Life Group Signups>>

Let's pray our benediction together:



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on Heaven or Hell:

- Joel 3:1-21
- Zechariah 14:4-5
- Matthew 16:27-28; 22:37-40
- Luke 10:25-37
- John 8:41-44; 15:4-7
- 1 Corinthians 16:22
- Colossians 3:4
- 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8
- James 2:14-26
- 1 John 3:10, 14-18, 23; 4:7-21; 5:1-5
- Jude 14-15
- Revelation 19:11-16

- Dr. Michael Vlach on Judgment - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2M5xPkF1JM>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/real-difference-sheep-goats/>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/you-dont-know-god-if-you-dont-love-christ>

- *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, Benware
- *Biblical Teaching on the Doctrines of Heaven and Hell*, Donnelly

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Matthew 25:34 and 46b. What can we learn about God's kingdom from these verses? Who is qualified to enter the kingdom? On what basis? (c.f. 4:17; 7:21)
2. Read Matthew 3:12; 8:12; 13:41-42, 50; 18:8-9; 22:13; 25:30, 41, 46a. What can we learn about hell from these verses? Practically speaking, how does the reality of eternal punishment affect how you live day by day?
3. According to verse 45, what "sin of omission" (James 4:17) is shared by all who inhabit hell? According to verse 46, what is the duration of the unbeliever's judgment in hell?
4. Read Matthew 19:28; 25:31-33 and Revelation 20:4-6. Do you agree with the expected literal fulfillment of OT prophesy (i.e. Isaiah 2:4; 2 Samuel 7:16; Daniel 7:13-27; etc.) in Jesus' earthly kingdom, earthly throne, and literal 1,000 year reign, or do you spiritualize these promises to be entirely fulfilled in the church?
5. Review Matthew 24:31, 46; 25:21, 35-40. What are some outward evidences that we are true followers of Christ? Do you see these evidences (even if not perfectly) in your own life?