

**“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.**

<sup>34</sup> **“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’**

<sup>37</sup> **“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’**

<sup>40</sup> **“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’**

<sup>41</sup> **“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’**

<sup>44</sup> **“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’**

<sup>45</sup> **“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’**

<sup>46</sup> **“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (NIV 84)**

Theme: Christ’s Judgment is White or Black

1. You believe in Jesus, or you don’t.
2. You do good works, or you don’t.

There is truth, and there is not truth. Something is true, or it isn’t. There is absolute truth. Not too long ago this was the case. Many people were confused about what was true and what wasn’t, but in people’s minds there was absolute truth. But then, the philosophy of much of the world changed. Now in the world’s eyes, there is not absolute truth. Truth is no longer objective, but subjective. What is true for you may not be true for others.

You can understand the problem this philosophy causes when it comes to God’s word. We know the truth—Jesus is God, Jesus is the Savior of the world, and all who believe in him will be given the gift of eternal life; he will come again to judge the world on the last day. But others respond, “That may be true for you, but not me.”

Or try this one—the truth is that God will judge the world on the basis of his grace, which is received through faith in Jesus Christ. But some may say respond, “that is true for you, but no me. I believe that we are saved by how good we are. Let me believe what I want to believe, and I won’t force my beliefs down your throat either.” And that sounds pretty reasonable. So we let people go on thinking that they are saved by what they do; and then we lead them to rely on their works for when Christ comes to judge the world.

Although, it may be hard to see at first, today we see that when God judges the world we will be saved by grace through faith. And there is no grey area here—Christ’s judgment is white or black. Either you believe in Jesus, or you don’t. Either you do good works, or you don’t.

Our text for today takes place at the end of a conversation Jesus was having with his disciples about the end of the world. Jesus spent two full chapters in Matthew talking about this subject. He had already mentioned how when he, the Son of Man, returns, he is going to come like a thief in the night. No one will know when he is coming; therefore it is important that we be prepared at all times. But when he returns there will be no mistaking it. He will not come in secret and take all believers with him in heaven leaving everyone else on this earth for awhile—like those who teach the rapture say. He will come again with all the multitude of angels and a loud trumpet blast. The angels will gather together everyone from the corners of the earth. And they will stand before the judgment throne of God.

Then when everyone is assembled, Jesus, in his full glory, will sit down on that judgment throne. Some people deny the truth that Jesus is God. “That is your opinion, but not mine” they say. But when Christ comes again everyone will know. He will be in his full glory—the glory of God. There will be no second guessing as to who Jesus is. Everyone will know that he is God and that he is our Savior. But by then it will be too late.

This will be the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy in our first lesson for today. Jesus will come again. Christ the King will sit on his glorious judgment throne and he will open up the book of life. He will begin to judge the world. By this time, everyone will know where they stand. Those who didn’t believe in Jesus will be scared. For they know that they are going to hell. But those who do believe will rejoice. For they believed and they know what will happen.

Jesus then will gather some on his left and others on his right—like a shepherd separates sheep from goats. Sheep on his right. Goats on his left. Jesus explains what will happen next. **“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’** The sheep will be taken to heaven. Taken to a place that God made specifically for his believers from the creation of the world. As for the goats? **He will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’** The goats will be sent to hell. They will be sent to a place that wasn’t even meant for them. It is a place that was made to punish the devil and the fellow angels who rebelled against God. Hell, a place meant to punish demons, will be their home for eternity.

The question is: who are the sheep and who are the goats? The sheep are believers. For they know his voice and they follow him. They know Jesus to be God and the Savior of the entire world. They believe that through his death our sins have been paid for. And through his resurrection we will live with him in heaven forever. The goats then are unbelievers. Those who do not know Christ. Believers then, will be given the gift of eternal life in heaven. Unbelievers will be sent to hell.

It is as simple as that. You are either a believer or you are an unbeliever. You either believe that Jesus Christ is God, or you don’t.

You either believe in the one true Triune God, or you worship false gods like Buddha, Allah, the Jehovah of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the heavenly father of the Mormons, or perhaps yourself and your desires. Either you believe in Jesus Christ as the only way to eternal life, or you don’t. You either believe that Jesus took away your sins on the cross, or you don’t. Either you believe that you cannot and do not contribute anything to your salvation, or you think that you can somehow please God enough to make him save you. Its either by grace, or works—it cannot be both.

is white or black. Believer in Christ, or not. There is no grey area. This is an absolute truth. What is true for me, is also true for you. It is true whether you believe it or not. “But its not fair,” we might think. “How can there be only one way to eternal life? Certainly God will allow others ways to heaven. We must be able to contribute somehow for our eternal life. What about those who never heard about Jesus? What if they never had the chance to believe? I’m sure that Jesus will have compassion on them. I’m guessing that he is going to take their life into account as well.”

“Nothing is absolute anymore” is an argument we often hear and we may use. But God’s word is absolute truth. For he is truth. It is true that we are horrible miserable sinners. That we deserve nothing but God’s wrath and punishment. It is truth that even through we sin against him constantly God showed love to us by sending his son Jesus Christ. It is true that he lived a perfect life for us. That he gave up his life on the cross. And suffered through the pain and agony of hell in our place. It is true that the Holy Spirit worked faith into our hearts only through the means of grace. And that all who believe in him will live in heaven forever. Those who do not will be sent to a place that wasn’t made for them.

This is true whether you believe it or not. It is absolute truth. You are either a believer or unbeliever. And therefore you either do good works, or you don’t. For only believes can do good works.

Believers will go to heaven, while unbelievers will go to hell. Notice the basis for Christ’s judgment. It’s not what we do. It’s what he has done. Jesus looks at the faith he gave us, through which we receive the blessings he won for us. He does not look at what we did while we

lived on earth. It is clear from the rest of Scripture that we are saved purely by God's grace. Paul says in Ephesians, **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.** And again in Romans, **For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**

But what about here? Jesus essentially says that those who do good are saved. Most of us have heard this discourse before. He says to those he is taking to heaven, **For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.** And so on. And as we find out later, it wasn't because they did these things directly for Christ, but for others. When we take care of others—no matter how small or insignificant they may be, we are really doing nice things for Christ. So those who do good things will be saved.

Then the opposite is also true. Those who don't do good are not saved. And that is exactly what Jesus told the goats. **For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.** And so on. Jesus made it clear that those who don't do good will not make it heaven. Instead of having eternal life, they will have eternal death.

“Wait a second,” you might be saying right now, “I thought it is the truth that we are saved by God's grace, apart from what we do.” Yes, that is true. “Then why does Jesus make it seem that our eternal life depends on what we do?” It may seem like that at first until you look closer. Jesus said those who do good works will be saved. And only believers do good works. Only believers have their actions washed through the blood of Christ. Everything an unbeliever does is nothing but a sin. Even if they do the same thing a believer does—a believer is innocent in God's eyes while an unbeliever is guilty. The writer to the Hebrews says, **Without faith it is impossible to please God.** Jesus says, **Apart from me you can do nothing.** It is impossible for an unbeliever to do anything right in God's eyes. Even when they give to the needy that are not pleasing God because it's not done out of faith in him.

What about believers? They do good works. It is simply what they do. It is a result of their faith. It is evidence that they do truly believe.

It is not a cause of their faith. It is not what makes God save them. Rather it is a result of having been brought to faith. Out of love and thanks for everything that Christ has done for them, believers follow his word. Those who do good works will be saved. Not because they do good works, but through their faith that Christ has given them. And their works are evidence that they have been brought to faith.

The sheep were well aware of the truth that we are saved by grace through faith. They replied to Jesus' explanation as to why he saved them with confusion. What did we do to deserve this? What did do to cause you to give us eternal life? In other words, we don't deserve this gift. If they trusting on their works for eternal life, what do you think their answer would have been? “You are right God; I did show love to you and to others. I'm glad you noticed all the times I did a good work. I was hoping to get credit for them” Instead, the believers had no idea what they did. They didn't keep track of their good works. They were just doing what their faith caused them to do. They showed love to others because Christ showed love to them. And in turn they showed love to Christ.

Another way we see that we are saved by God's grace is that Jesus only mentions the good things the believers did. He doesn't mention the many times that we don't give food to the hungry, clothes to the bare, or shelter to those out in the cold. We must admit that there are many times that we don't show love to others and thus fail to love God. But graciously Jesus doesn't mention any of those. He only mentions the good things we have done. For he has removed all our sins. He does not count them against us. He looks at us and sees perfect holy believers. He sees his dear children, sinless just like his Son Jesus Christ. And then, as Jesus told the sheep, he gives them the inheritance of the kingdom. An inheritance is a gift given free of charge for no reason. Our eternal life is by God's grace alone.

That is the truth. There is no grey area here—just white or black. Believer or unbeliever. One who does good works or one that doesn't do good works. The truth is that Christ is going to come again—soon. And when he does he will judge the world. He will take those who do good—that is believers to heaven. And those who don't to hell. So we believers have nothing to fear, for we will receive our inheritance of heaven. Amen.