

[R654 : page 6]

## **PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS.**

**MATT. 25:31-46.**

It has been truly said, that order is heaven's first law; yet few, we think, have realized how emphatically this is true. In glancing back over the plan of the ages, there is nothing which gives such conclusive evidence of a Divine Director as the order observed in all its parts.

As we have seen, God has had definite and stated times and seasons for every part of his work; and in the end of each of these seasons there was a finishing up of that work and a clearing off of the rubbish, preparatory to the beginning of the new work of the dispensation to follow. Thus in the end of the first dispensation (from creation to the flood), which, as we have seen, was placed under the control of the angels, there was a finishing work – an exhortation through Noah to forsake sin and turn to righteousness, and a warning of certain retribution. And when the full end of the time allotted for that dispensation had come, there was a selection and saving of all that was worth saving and a clean sweeping destruction of all the refuse; and with that which remained a new dispensation began.

In the end of the Jewish dispensation the same thing is observed – a harvesting and complete separation of the wheat class from the chaff, and an entire rejection of the latter class from God's favor. With the few judged worthy in the end of that age, a new dispensation began; and now we find ourselves amidst the closing scenes (the harvest) of this Gospel dispensation. The wheat and tares which have grown together during this age are being separated. And with the former class, of which Jesus is the head, a new dispensation is about to be inaugurated, and these are to reign as kings and priests

in that new dispensation, while the tare element is judged as utterly unworthy of that favor.

As a skilled mechanic or artisan puts on the finishing touches and brushes away the refuse materials from one part of his work preparatory to the beginning of another part, so God has made a full end of each dispensation, preserving the finished work and casting off the refuse.

While observing this order with reference to the dispensations past and the one just closing, our Lord informs us through the parable under consideration, that the same order will be observed with reference to the dispensation to follow this.

The harvest of the Jewish age was likened to the separation of wheat from chaff; the harvest of this age to the separation of wheat from tares; and the harvest of the Millennial age to the separation of sheep from goats.

That this parable refers to the Millennial age is clearly indicated in verses 31 and 32 – "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, THEN shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." As in the present age, every act of those on trial (the Church) goes to make a part of that character which, in due time, will determine the final decision of the Judge in our case, so will it be with the world (the nations) in the age to come. As in the present age, the trial of the majority of the individual members of the church ends, and the decision of their case is reached long before the end of the age (2 Tim. 4:7,8); so under the Millennial reign, the decision of some individual cases will be reached long before the end of the age (Isa. 65:20); but in both ages there is a harvest or general separation time in the end of the age.

In the dawn of the Millennial age, after the "time of trouble," there will be a gathering of the living nations before Christ, and in their appointed time and order, the dead of all nations shall be called to appear before the judgment seat of Christ – not to receive an immediate sentence, but to receive a fair and impartial trial, under the most favorable circumstances, the result of which trial will be a final sentence, as worthy or unworthy of everlasting life.

The scene of this parable, then, is laid after the time of trouble and after the exaltation of the "little flock" to the throne, when the nations have been subdued, Satan bound (Rev. 20:2) and the authority of Christ's kingdom established. The Bride of Christ, ere this, will have been seated with him in his throne, and will have taken part in executing the judgments of the great day of wrath. Now the Son of man appears (is made manifest) to the world "in his glory," and together Jesus and his Bride "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. 13:43.)

Here is the New Jerusalem as John saw it, (Rev. 21,) "that holy city [symbol of government]...coming down from God out of heaven." During all the time of trouble it was coming down, and now it has touched the earth. This is the stone cut out of the mountains (kingdoms of earth) without hands, (but by the power of God,) and now it has become a great mountain, (kingdom,) and has filled the whole earth, (Dan. 2:35,) its coming having broken to pieces (Dan. 2:34,35) the evil kingdoms of the Prince of darkness.

Here is that glorious city, (government,) **[R654 : page 7]** prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, (Rev. 21:2,) and the nations are beginning to walk in the light of it. (ver. 24.) These may bring their glory and honor into it, but there shall in no wise enter into it (or become a part of it) anything that defileth," etc. (ver. 27.) Here, from the midst of the throne, proceeds a pure river of water of life, (truth unmixed with error,) and the Spirit and the Bride say,

come, and take it freely. (Rev. 22:17.) Here begins the world's probation, the world's great judgment day – a thousand years.

But even in this favored time of blessing and healing of the nations, when Satan is bound, evil restrained, mankind released from the grasp of death, and when the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth, two classes will be developed, which Jesus, in this parable, likens to sheep and goats. These, he tells us, he will separate. The sheep class – those who are meek, teachable and willing to be led, shall, during the age, be gathered at the Judge's right hand – symbol of the Judge's approval; but the goat class, self-willed and stubborn, always climbing on the rocks – seeking prominence and approval among men – and feeding on miserable refuse, while the sheep graze in the rich pastures of truth furnished by the Good Shepherd, these are gathered to the Judge's left hand opposite the position of favor – as subjects of his disfavor and condemnation.

In the end of the Millennial age, in the final adjustment of human affairs, Jesus thus addresses his sheep: "Come ye blessed...inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." What kingdom? Was not the kingdom under the whole heavens given to the saints? (Dan. 7:22.)

Yes, as we have heretofore seen, a "little flock," "the saints," the overcoming "sheep" of the Gospel age, having followed the Lamb (Jesus) whithersoever he went, through evil and through good report, even to the sacrificing of the human life, with him have been exalted to the divine nature, and to the throne of the spiritual, unseen kingdom, and He (the Christ, head and body) must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet, (1 Cor. 15:25.) The saints shall reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:6.) **[R655 : page 7]**

Jesus calls believers of the Gospel age who know and obey his voice, his sheep. But he says, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold (referring to those who should become his followers in the

Millennial age,) them also I must lead (into truth and righteousness during that age,) and there shall be one fold and one shepherd. Jesus and the "little flock," the Bride, united as one, will be the Good Shepherd, who will lead mankind into the one fold of safety – harmony with God.

This gradual work of separating sheep and goats will require all of the Millennial age for its accomplishment. During that age, each individual as he comes gradually to a knowledge of God and his will, by conforming or not conforming thereto, takes his place at the right hand of favor, or the left hand of disfavor according as he improves or misimproves the opportunities of that golden age. By the end of that age, all the world of mankind (not the present Church) will have arranged themselves, as shown in the parable, into two classes. As in nature, sheep are far more numerous than goats, so we doubt not that with the perfect knowledge then possessed, the sheep company will far outnumber the goats.

With the end of that age is the end of the world's trial, or judgment, and final disposition is made of the two classes. The goats who have not developed the element of love – the law of God's being and kingdom – are not counted worthy of life, and must be destroyed, while the sheep who have developed, and by deeds exhibited God-likeness (love) are to be installed as the rulers of earth for future ages.

The work of restitution will not be quite complete until the great mass of mankind, having been restored to the perfect condition, is re-invested with the dominion of earth as possessed by Adam before sin entered, as God had said, "After our likeness let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, over the cattle and over all the earth,...and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" – a ruler over earth, like as God is ruler over all things. And the Psalmist expresses the same idea, saying,

Thou hast made man a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor; thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands. (Ps. 8:5-8.) The dominion is not to be over each other, for when the law of love controls human hearts, there will be no necessity for dominion over one another, though by mutual consent, prompted by love, regulations may be made among themselves for the common good and blessing of all.

This, then, is the kingdom that has been preparing for MANKIND from the foundation of the world. It was expedient that man should suffer six thousand years under the dominion of evil, to learn its inevitable results, misery and death, and in order by contrast to prove the justice, wisdom and goodness of God's law – love. Then it requires the seventh thousand years under the reign of Christ, to restore him from ruin and death, to the perfect condition, thereby fitting him to inherit the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world.

This kingdom in which all are kings, will really be a GRAND REPUBLIC, whose stability and blessed influence will be assured, by the perfection of every member, which result now so much desired is almost an impossibility. The kingdom of the saints is on the contrary a Theocracy which will rule the world (during the period of its imperfection and restoration) without regard to their consent or approval.

But the righteous will inquire why they are crowned with such glory, honor and dominion. And the Lord replies: "I was hungry, and you fed me; thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; in prison, and you came unto me."

"Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?"

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Let us notice who these are that Jesus calls his brethren, and in what sense the evils here named may be true of them. We observe, first, that Jesus is addressing all the sheep or the righteous class, in the end of the Millennial age. Then all of that class will have had opportunity to minister to the necessities of the Lord's brethren. Jesus calls the Church of the Gospel age his brethren (Matt. 12:49,50,) but all of the sheep class then addressed, will not have had opportunity to minister to those brethren. Millions of the sheep class will be of those who lived before the Gospel Church had an existence; and others will have been born during the Millennial age, after the Gospel Church has been exalted and no longer needs their ministry.

The brethren of the Gospel Church then are not the only brethren of Christ. All who at that time will have been restored to perfection, will be recognized as sons of God; sons in the same sense that Adam was a son of God. (Luke 3:38) – human sons. And all of God's sons whether on the human, the angelic, or the divine planes, are BRETHREN. Jesus' love for these, his brethren, is here expressed. As the world will now have opportunity to minister to those who are shortly to be the divine sons of God, and brethren of Christ, so they will have abundant opportunity during the age to come to minister to (each other) the human brethren.

The dead nations when again brought into existence will need food, and raiment, and shelter. However great may have been their possessions in this life, death will have brought all to a common level; the infant and the man of maturer years, the millionaire and the pauper, the learned and the unlearned, the cultured and the

ignorant and degraded, and all will have an abundant opportunity for the exercise of benevolence, and thus they will be privileged to be co-workers with God. We are here reminded of the illustration given in the case of Lazarus: Jesus only awakened him from death, and then permitted the rejoicing friends to loose him from his grave clothes and clothe him and feed him.

Further, these are said to be "sick and in prison," (more properly, under ward or watch.) The grave is the great prison where the millions of humanity have been held in unconscious captivity; but when released from the grave, the restoration to perfection is not an instantaneous work. Being not yet perfect, they may properly be termed sick and under ward. They are not dead, neither are they yet perfect; and any condition between those two is properly called sick. And they will continue to be under watch or ward until made well – physically, mentally, and morally perfect. During that time there will be abundant opportunity for mutual helpfulness, sympathy, instruction and encouragement.

Since mankind will not all be raised at once, but in separate ranks or orders (1 Cor. 15:23) during the thousand years, each new rank will find an army of helpers in those who will have preceded them. The love and benevolence which men will then show to each other (the brethren of Christ) the King will count as shown to him. No great deeds are assigned as the ground for the honors and favors conferred upon the righteous; they have simply come into harmony with God's law – love – and proved it by their works. "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10), and "God is love," so, when man is restored again to the image of God – "very good" – man also will be love.

Then follows the message to those on the left – "Depart from me ye cursed (condemned)" – condemned, as unfit vessels for the glory and honor of life, who would not yield to the moulding and



shaping influences of divine love. When these my brethren were hungry, and thirsty, naked, sick, and in prison, ye ministered not to their necessities, thus continually proving yourselves out of harmony with the heavenly city (kingdom) for "there shall in no case enter into it anything that defileth." The decision and sentence regarding this class is, "Depart from me into everlasting fire [symbol of destruction] prepared for the devil and his angels." Elsewhere (Heb. 2:14) we read in plain language that Christ "will destroy...him that has the power of death that is the devil." And the lake of fire is defined to be the second death (Rev. 20:14).

"And these" [the goats] "go away into everlasting punishment" [cutting off – Diaglott – cutting off from life] "but the righteous into life eternal." The punishment is as lasting as the reward. The reward is everlasting life; the punishment is to be forever cut off from life – everlasting death; a death from which there will be no redemption, no resurrection.

To the sheep it is said, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But though God give it to man at first, and designs restoring it to him when he has prepared him for the great trust, we are not to suppose that God intends man to rule it except as under or in harmony with his supreme law. "Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven," must forever be the rule.

Man henceforth will rule his dominion in harmony with the law of heaven – delighting continually to do his will "in whose favor is life, and at whose right hand [condition of favor] there are pleasures forevermore." (Ps. 16:11.) O who would not say, "Haste thee along ages of glory," and give glory and honor to him whose loving plans are blossoming into such fullness of blessing.

**[R656 : page 7]**

"BEWARE of evil thoughts. They have done great mischief in the world. Watch against them; pray against them. They prepare the way for the enemy."

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