

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

**"These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." – Matt. 25:31-46.**

WHILE the Scriptures, as we have shown, do not teach the blasphemous doctrine of everlasting torment, they do most emphatically teach the everlasting punishment of the wicked, the class represented in the parable as "goats." Let us examine the parable, and then the sentence pronounced at its close.

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.

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 has been a finishing up of its 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 Jewish age order 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 age – the Gospel age – began. And now we find ourselves amidst the closing scenes, the "harvest," of this age: the "wheat" and the "tares" which have grown together during this age are being separated. With the former class, of which our Lord Jesus is the Head, a new age is about to be inaugurated, and these "wheat" are to reign as kings and priests in that new dispensation, while the "tare" element is judged as utterly unworthy of that favor.

While observing this order with reference to the Jewish age 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 age to follow this Gospel age.

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 the parable of the sheep and the goats 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 each age there is a "harvest" or general separating 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, individual trial (Ezek. 18:2-4,19,20) under the most favorable circumstances, the result of which trial will be a final sentence, as worthy or unworthy of everlasting life.\*

\*See [THE PLAN OF THE AGES, Chapter 8](#).

The scene of this parable, therefore, is laid after the time of trouble, when the nations shall have been subdued, Satan bound ([Rev. 20:1,2](#)) and the authority of Christ's kingdom established. Ere this, the bride of Christ (the overcoming Church) will have been seated with him in his throne of spiritual power and will have taken part in executing the judgments of the **[R2759 : page 38]** great day of wrath. Then the Son of man and his bride, the glorified Church, will be revealed and be seen by men, with the eyes of their understanding and shall "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 the time of trouble it will be coming down, and before the end of it, it will have touched the earth. This is the stone cut out of the mountains without hands (but by the power of God), and it will then have become a great mountain (kingdom), filling the whole earth ([Dan. 2:35](#)), its *coming* having broken to pieces the evil kingdoms of the prince of darkness. – [Dan. 2:34,35](#).

Here is that glorious city (government), prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ([Rev. 21:2](#)), and early in the dawn of the Millennium the nations will begin to walk in the light of it. ([Verse 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. ([Verse 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.\*

\*See [THE PLAN OF THE AGES, Chap. 8, The Day of Judgment](#).

But even in this favored time of blessing and healing of the nations, when Satan is bound, evil restrained, mankind in process of release from the grasp of death, and when the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth, two classes will be developed, which our Lord here 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 Millennial age, be gathered at the Judge's right hand – symbol of his approval and favor; 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 the truth furnished by the Good Shepherd – these are gathered to the Judge's left hand, the opposite of the position of favor – as subjects of his disfavor and condemnation.

This 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, 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 will have arranged themselves, as shown in the parable, into two classes.

The end of that age will be the end of the world's trial or judgment, and then final disposition will be made of the two classes. The reward of this "sheep" class will be granted them because, during the age of trial and discipline, they cultivated and manifested the beautiful character of love, which Paul describes as the fulfilling of the Law of God. (Rom. 13:10.) They will have manifested it to each other in their times of sorest need; and what they will have done for one another the Lord will count as done unto him, counting them all as his brethren – children of God, though they will be of the human nature, while he is of the divine.

The condemnation of the "goat" class is shown to be for the lack of this spirit of love. Under the same favorable circumstances as the "sheep," they wilfully resist the moulding influence of the Lord's discipline, and harden their hearts. The goodness of God does not lead them to true repentance; but, like Pharaoh, they take advantage of his goodness and do evil. The "goats," who will not have developed the element of *love*, the law of God's being and Kingdom, will be counted unworthy of everlasting life, and will be destroyed; while the "sheep," who will have developed God-likeness (love), and who will have exhibited it in their characters, are to be installed as the subordinate rulers of earth for future ages.

In the end of the Millennial age, in the final adjustment of human affairs, Christ thus addresses his sheep: "Come, ye blessed,...inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

It is manifest the "sheep" here addressed, at the close of the Millennium, are not the sheep of the Gospel age, the Gospel Church, but those "other sheep" to whom the Lord referred in John 10:16. And the kingdom prepared for them in the divine plan, from the foundation of the world, is not the kingdom prepared for the Gospel Church. The Church will receive her kingdom at the beginning of the Millennium; but this is the kingdom prepared for the "sheep" of the Millennial age. Their kingdom will be the dominion of earth which was originally given to Adam, but which was lost through sin, and which is again to be restored when man is brought to perfection, and so made fit to receive and enjoy it. That dominion will not be a dominion of some of the race over others, but a joint dominion, in which every man will be a king, and all will have equal rights and privileges in appropriating and enjoying every earthly good. It will be a sovereign people – a great and grand republic on a basis of perfect righteousness, wherein the rights of every man

will be conserved; because the golden rule will be inscribed on every heart, and every man will love his neighbor as himself. The dominion of all will be over the whole earth, and all its rich and bountiful stores of blessing. (Gen. 1:28; Psa. 8:5-8.) The kingdom of the world, to be given to the perfected and worthy ones of the redeemed race at the close of the Millennium, is clearly distinguished from all others by being called the kingdom prepared for them "from the foundation of the world," the earth having been made to be the everlasting home and kingdom of perfect men. But the kingdom bestowed upon Christ, of which the Church, his "bride," becomes joint-heir, is a spiritual kingdom, "far above angels, principalities and powers," and it also shall "have no end" – Christ's Millennial Kingdom, which *will end*, being merely a beginning of Christ's power and rule. (1 Cor. 15:25-28.) This endless heavenly, spiritual kingdom was prepared long before the earth was founded – its inception being recognized in Christ, "the beginning of the creation of God." It was intended for Christ Jesus, the First Begotten; but even the Church, his bride and joint-heir, was chosen or designed also, in him, *before* the foundation of the world. – Eph. 1:4.

The kingdom or rule of earth, is the kingdom that has been in preparation 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 of misery and death, in order by contrast to prove the justice, wisdom and goodness of God's law of love. Then it will [R2759 : page 39] require 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."

That kingdom, in which all will be kings, will be one grand, universal republic, whose stability and blessed influence will be assured by the perfection of its every citizen, a result now much

desired, but an impossibility because of sin. The kingdom of Christ during the Millennium will be, on the contrary, a theocracy, which will rule the world (during the period of its imperfection and restoration) without regard to its consent or approval.

The brethren of the Gospel Church 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 plane, are *brethren*. Our Lord's love for these, his human brethren, is here expressed. As the world now has the 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, 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 mature years, the millionaire and the pauper, the learned and the unlearned, the cultured and the ignorant and degraded: 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 were the rejoicing friends permitted to loose him from his grave clothes and to clothe 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 to be an instantaneous work. Being not yet

perfect, they may properly be termed *sick*, and *under ward*: not dead, neither are they yet perfected in life: and any condition between those two may be properly symbolized by sickness. 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, and any failure to assist will mark a lack of the Lord's spirit of love.

Since all mankind will not be raised at once, but gradually, during the thousand years, each new group will find an army of helpers in those who will have preceded it. 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 will have simply come into harmony with God's law of 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 a living expression of love.

"Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," does not signify a rule independent of the divine law and supremacy: for although God gave earth's dominion 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, otherwise than as under, or in harmony with, his supreme law. "Thy will be done in earth as in heaven," must forever be the principle of government. Man thenceforth 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." (Psa. 16:11.) Oh! who would not say, "Haste ye along, ages of glory!" and give glory and honor to him whose loving plans are blossoming into such fulness of blessing?



Let us now examine 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, "brethren," were hungry and thirsty, or 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 or 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 without symbol that Christ "will *destroy*...him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

"And these [the "goats"] shall go away into everlasting [Greek, *aionios* – lasting] punishment, but the righteous into life eternal [Greek, *aionios* – lasting.]" The punishment will be as lasting as the reward. Both will be everlasting.

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