

## *Expectations*

Matthew 25:31-46 (November 22, 2020)

### ***Matthew 25:31-46***

<sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

### ***Historical Context***

Ancient people drew moral analogies from the habits of sheep and goats. Sheep were intelligent, yet quiet animals, submissive, yet persistent. Male sheep fiercely protected their harems from challengers. In a culture that encouraged loud debate and social one-upmanship, contemporaries of Jesus admired sheep for their loyalty and silent strength. Goats, however, were stubborn, destructive animals if left unattended. Male goats did not protect their mates from other males. The name "goat" became a derogatory term for a man shamed by the adultery of his wife. So, Jews hated the symbol of the goat, for it represented a disobedient, undisciplined lifestyle.

### ***Theme: Expectations***

In this parable, Jesus promises to be always with and for those who are in greatest need. Which means that if we want to experience God’s presence fully, deeply, and truly, we will look for God in the need of those around us and, indeed, in our own need as well. This is not, what we expect of God. We typically think of God in ultimate terms – all knowing, all-powerful, all-just, and so on. But that’s not where Jesus invites us to meet, or be met by, God. And this act of condescension takes us by surprise, upsetting our expectations and disrupting our plans.

But maybe it shouldn’t, as the God we know in Jesus seems to delight in such surprises. After all, God didn’t come to reign over humanity at Athens or Rome or any of the other major cities where one would expect God to arrive, but rather God came to identify *with* us by being born in lowly Bethlehem in the form of a vulnerable infant. And God didn’t come to conquer the world with military or political might, but instead in the scandal, shame, and pain of the cross. So also

God continues to come where we least expect God to be: in the plight of the homeless, on the side of the poor, in the face of the needy, and in the company of the imprisoned.

And that's not all. If we are willing to suspend our expectations and live into the surprising reality of the God we know in Christ, then we are invited to meet God not in some distant eternal life or other-worldly reality but here and now, in the concrete and real need of our neighbors, just as they are invited to meet and be blessed by God as they tend to our needs as well. The God we know in Jesus is revealed, that is, not in power but in vulnerability, not in might but brokenness, and not in judgment but in mercy.