

MATTHEW 25:31-46

WILL A GOOD GOD REALLY SEND BAD PEOPLE TO HELL?

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 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. 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.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ 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.’

“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. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 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.’ 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?’ 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.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”¹

Unquestionably, the Bible warns that the wicked will be turned into hell [see **PSALMS 9:17 NKJV**]. However, many contemporary Christians appear no longer to believe this warning to be true. Surprising numbers of professed believers have aligned themselves with Jehovah’s Witnesses, protesting, “Why, I wouldn’t throw a dog into a fire.” They imagine that this faux sensitivity somehow puts an end to any such consideration. Others have created a god according to their imagination—a god that is a benign, cosmic figure who smiles over his wayward children; yet, he can never quite bring himself to say “No!” to them.

Nevertheless, we are warned repeatedly in the Word that all who depend upon their own righteousness must give an accounting to God who is perfect. When fallen man stands before Holy God, he shall inevitably fail to measure up to the perfection demanded by the True and Living God. The Master warns, “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” [**LUKE 12:4, 5**]!

Moreover, there is a dreadful warning presented in the Apocalypse. It speaks of the mankind’s rebellion at the end of the millennial reign of the Master. Satan and all the demonic powers will have been incarcerated throughout that idyllic period. However, they will be released, and when they are released, they will deceive the peoples of earth, inciting them to revolt in a vain attempt to dethrone the Son of God. They will seek to overthrow Him, only to meet utter defeat. The conclusion of the rebellion is told in **REVELATION 20:10-15**.

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“The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

In the text, Jesus gives the account of His judgement on the nations of the world at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation and before the Millennium begins. This is not the judgement of the wicked before the Great White Throne, but it presents grave truths that give answer to the question asked, “Will a good God really send bad people to hell?”

JESUS PRESENTS HIMSELF AS JUDGE OVER THE WORLD — Let’s establish one significant and vital truth at the outset: *Jesus is the Judge of mankind!* Notice the unpretentious manner with which He introduces this instruction. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne” [MATTHEW 25:31]. Jesus assumes that He will return in His full glory and that He will be seated on His heavenly throne. He presents Himself as Judge over the nations existing at that time.

Recall the statement Jesus made to Jewish religious leaders concerning His judgement. “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” [JOHN 5:19-30].

Elsewhere, the Master presents the same truth when He says, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind” [JOHN 9:39]. The presence of Jesus is a judgement on sin; but the underlying truth is that He alone is worthy of judging mankind, as He alone judges with justice and truth, exposing the secrets of the heart. Jesus alone is capable of rendering perfect justice, for He alone knows the heart. Thus, all mankind must stand before the Son of God to give an account of life.

Peter, also, testifies that Jesus has been appointed to judge all mankind. In Cornelius' house, Peter testified, [God] "commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead" [ACTS 10:42].

LIFE EXPRESSES WHAT IS IN THE HEART — As I look at the text, I observe a disquieting truth that seems frequently to be ignored from the pulpit in this day: What we believe is revealed through how we live. Here is a maxim to guide your assessment of professions: What we believe is witnessed through how we live; all else is mere talk. It becomes obvious that Jesus judges on how the peoples have lived, and not on the basis of what they professed.

Jesus warns, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" [MATTHEW 7:21-23].

It is an axiom of the Faith that faith results in a transformed life. Recall Jesus' statement, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" [JOHN 14:21]. Paul explains this truth in similar manner when he says, "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Note what follows as a corollary: "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" [EPHESIANS 2:8-10]. An old couplet says,

Faith alone saves;
but the faith that saves is never alone.

We are taught that the "new self" is "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" [see EPHESIANS 4:24]. We do not live godly lives in order to be saved; but because we are saved, we seek to live godly and holy lives.

This is the reason that those who receive the judgement that will be delivered from the Great White Throne will be judged "according to what they had done" [REVELATION 20:12, 13]. Let me restate the issue: it is possession and not profession that saves. Either we possess Christ by faith, or we are lost. Either we have received the new life and we are transformed, or we are attempting to do the impossible by getting into heaven throughout our own effort. Isaiah describes our condition with shocking words when he writes:

"We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

[ISAIAH 64:6]

THE WICKED ARE BANISHED TO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT — Though we are prone to rank actions, we know that before God, any action that is not perfect is sinful! Consequently, all sinful acts must be judged. Either our unrighteousness has been judged *in* Christ, or we shall be judged *by* Christ. Either He has taken our sin upon Himself, or we are still in our sin.

Jesus uttered some incredibly dark words that are recorded in our text. The Master warned that the wicked “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” [MATTHEW 25:46]. Some self-professed scholars endeavour to soften the words Jesus spoke by contending that eternal punishment does not mean unending punishment. However, observe that Jesus used the identical word to describe the life that the righteous possess. If one argues that the righteous receive eternal life, then that one is compelled to acknowledge that the wicked are consigned to eternal punishment.

Ultimately, it is not so much that God consigns anyone to hell; rather, men and women choose eternity away from God and in the presence of the devil. Few individual deliberately choose to spend eternity in the dark confines of Gehenna; but through inaction—refusal to accept the sacrifice provided through Christ the Lord—they position themselves against God and against righteousness.

You see, ultimately, the wicked are those who failed to receive the grace of God through accepting that Christ died because of their sin. I trust this doesn’t describe your situation. Grace is now offered to all who are willing to receive it. Life and joy forevermore are now promised in Jesus, the Son of God. This is the Word of the Lord, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” God’s promise is summarised in this way, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13]. Therefore, all who believe Jesus died because of their sin and that He rose from the dead, receive the gift of life. Amen.