

# Matthew 25:31-46

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. Whatever one is going through in life, it doesn't diminish the size, power and authority of the living God.! And that came across in the worship this morning, for which I am so grateful.

! It's very easy to lose focus when the devil throws a load of stuff at you. But he is the King of all kings, the God of all gods.

He is magnificent and he is for us. Just to set something up in advance for you, by the way. The next time she attends, we're going to pray for her corporately.

She's been struggling for so long with these migraines. And as elders, we've prayed for her. And we got some weeks of relief from her condition, which seems to have come back with a vengeance.

And she's feeling, she's made it clear, she's very committed to being part of this church. She wants to be here. This is not any kind of malingering or anything like that.

[ 1 : 09 ] This is just that she, poor lady, is really suffering. And so the next time, I think we will just step up the prayer ante and we'll all pray for her.

So when she next attends, just be expecting that I will take some time aside that we can all pray for her. So Matthew 25. Brief recap.

So far in chapters 24 and 25, Jesus has told the religious Jews to be ready, to be alert, to be faithful. And he's already presented them with two parables in the first part of this chapter.

And those parables both urge readiness. Don't be caught unawares. Be ready. Keep focused.

Don't be taken by surprise. He's also mapped out for them some 15 different signs that they should look out for that will tell them his coming is near.

[ 2 : 10 ] And there's all the early parts of chapter 24, the wars, the rumors of wars, the pestilence, the earthquakes and so on. 15 different things to look out for. Unlike the church who are told they will be snatched in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.

I've made that point several times. And the message is if you're not alert, you'll be caught off guard by false Christ, by false prophets, by the abomination of desolation and so on.

They're also warned that this that when he does come again, when it all comes to a climax, it'll be accompanied by astronomical signs.

Stars falling from heaven. Massive earthquakes. It is portrayed as the most terrifying time you could even begin to imagine. And in the middle of all that or immediately at the end of all that, the sun goes dark.

And Jesus then comes in as the light of the world. Now, up to now in this chapter, we've waxed on about the context being that it is addressed to Jews.

[ 3 : 17 ] But as we move into the end of this chapter, you realize that the context has somewhat changed. And what is now being revealed to us in the bit that we're going to read today is what happens to everyone.

And the parameters God uses for separating people into basically two lots, sheep or goats. But the instruction so far is not about waiting for things to happen, but up to.

So where are we this morning? We're in verse 31, aren't we? So up to verse 30, chapters 24 and 25 up to verse 30. There's also an indication of how we should wait.

It's not just wait for these things to happen, but what should we be like when we're waiting? For example, the servants in the parable of the talents were to invest their time and resource wisely whilst they wait.

And not just bury the precious gift of salvation, if you remember. So I've just got some points I want to. This is separate from the passage we're about to read, but it's instructive to us and it's worth repeating.

[ 4 : 32 ] So number one, we wait as though the master's return will be unexpected. One of the things that blesses me a lot is when I chat to Lisa and she says, will it be now?

Will it be now? Well, but don't be tempted to return to normalcy. And what we've read in chapter 24, verse 36, is that it will be like it was in the days of Noah when they were marrying and giving in marriage and basically going about normal life as if he's not going to come.

So there's a warning about don't return to that normalcy, but stay expectant as though the master's return will be sudden.

But alongside that, we also wait as though the master's coming might be delayed for a long time.

So, yes, it might be today, but it might not be for another hundred years or whatever.

It doesn't time span, you know, fill in the blanks. It's not disclosed. So we've got to be expectant, but understand that it might not be yet.

[ 5 : 46 ] Sorry, Lisa. It might not be yet. Also, we await for this time of judgment as though he will ask us to give an account for our handling of his property when he comes.

So it would be a time of accounting. Now, we know, don't we, that for believers, your sin is paid for in Christ.

So you're not awaiting judgment for your sin. However, there is the judgment of believers works.

And so nobody will be left out in that time of judgment.

Everybody will be judged in some way. Although not all judgments lead to a place in hell. But it's an important thing to realize that we sail through life thinking we've been spared.

Well, yes, we have. But we still will be asked to give an account for what we've done with what God gave us. And then we also wait as though there will be eternal consequences, good or bad, for the way we've treated the Lord's brethren.

[ 6 : 59 ] When we give those accounts, which is the subject of the passage we're about to read. So turn to chapter 25, verse 31. That's Matthew. For those who are listening online, chapter 25 could be anywhere, couldn't it?

Verse 31. But when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them one from another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

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 naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

[ 8 : 04 ] I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink?

And when did we see you a stranger and invite you in or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? The king will answer and say to them, truly, I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.

Then he will also say to those on his left, the goats, depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in naked. And you did not clothe me sick and in prison.

And you did not visit me. Then they themselves will also answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?

[ 9 : 16 ] And he will answer them, truly, I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

And that last verse, just hang on to that verse there that clearly makes this something to do with salvation, not just works.

Right? Because the ones who were among the goats are going to eternal punishment. And the ones who were among the sheep are going to eternal life.

And that becomes very important as we go through. It also immediately unravels an awful lot of terrible teaching on this passage. So the first thing to notice, he comes in his glory with all his

angels with him.

It's the regal entry or maybe you could say the re-entry of the king of all kings, all powerful with complete authority and majestic presence.

[10:27] Turn briefly to 2 Chronicles 7. 2 Chronicles chapter 7. And verses 1 to 3.

Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices.

And the glory of the Lord filled the house. The priest could not enter into the house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house.

And all the sons of Israel seeing the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the house bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground.

And they worshipped and gave praise to the Lord saying, truly he is good. Truly his loving kindness is everlasting. You see, when it's described here as Jesus coming in his glory, on his glorious throne, we struggle to stretch our imaginations to cope with what that's going to look like.

[11:28] If you remember the apostle John in Revelation chapter 1, he fell on his face before the Lord.

Now the Lord hadn't come to antagonize John, but John was terrified and it says he fell on his face as though dead. The presence of God on his glorious throne is likely to have this incredible effect that no one will be able to stand until he says, as he did to John, do not fear.

And then he got up and then he was able to conduct himself with some degree of normality. But you see, in our culture, what happens is we shrivel Jesus down as if he's just when he comes in his glory going to be like another man.

This is going to blow our socks off. We are not going to be able to stand. And then in this situation of complete abject.

I don't know. I don't even know what word to use. The word belittling comes to mind, but I don't mean it in the moral sense. I mean, we are so small and so insignificant in the presence of almighty God, particularly when he's got his glory on show.

[12:59] Think of the Mount of Transfiguration. His glory was on show and Peter started saying, oh, I'll build a tabernacle for you if you like. And then this voice came with the glory and they fell down and they were terrified.

God's glory is awesome in the true sense of the word awesome, not the way it's used in local vernacular these days.

It will strike fear and dread into the hearts of everyone. And then when he separates us and says, you're a goat, you're a sheep.

When we hear that word, you're a sheep, there will be immense relief. Because the alternative is just awful. So this seems to be similar to what we read in Revelation and I'll come to it later.

But it's speaking of the end time judgment. It's not talking about the Jews. It's not talking about the church. It's talking about the whole of humanity, all nations. God separating all nations.

[14:09] And deciding who are sheep and who are goats. Makes you feel sorry for goats really, doesn't it? Now, it was common practice in those days to graze sheep and goats together on the hillside.

They would be as if they were one flock. Which is actually a bit of a reflection of our national church at the moment. It seems to be very much a mixture of people who are truly saved and people who are truly not.

But are paying some kind of verbal homage to a creator that they haven't really met and don't really know. But this was a common thing to do.

And then we know from the Bible that Jesus said, my sheep hear my voice and know me. We'll come to the scriptures on that in a moment. So normally, come night time, the sheep would stay on the hillside, perhaps in an open pen.

Be guarded by the shepherd. But they were proof against the cold. You see, they're woolly. So they don't feel the cold. Goats would normally be taken inside. And so there'd be a separation.

[15:25] Language here is being used that they will understand. Because the Hebrews were shepherds. And the shepherd analogy is one they would understand. And so you'd have a mixed herd and the shepherd would call out and the sheep would separate because they know his voice.

The goats would not respond to the same voice in the same way. And so the call of the shepherd would be enough to separate the sheep from the goats. So Jesus tends to use these analogies that

are common to the listener's experience.

Now, if we just turn to Revelation 19 a moment. Verse 11 to 19. And I saw heaven opened and behold, a white horse.

And he who sat on it is called faithful and true. And in righteousness he judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire and on his head are many diadems. And he has a name written on him which no one knows except himself.

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following him on white horses.

[16:47] From his mouth comes a sharp sword so that with it he may strike down the nations. And he will rule them with a rod of iron. And he treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God the Almighty.

And on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun crying out with a loud voice saying to all the birds which fly in the midheaven, Come assemble for the great supper of God so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of the commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men both free and slaves and small and great.

That is a description of the lot of the goats in my view. And it's not to be taken lightly. And if, as I confess I've sometimes felt, I'm saying, but that doesn't apply to me because I'm not a goat.

It suggests that I don't have a heart for the goats. Does it not? If I'm indifferent to it because it doesn't apply to me, it suggests I don't have a heart for them.

But knowing what they are going to suffer should make my heart cry out for them. Now this is a bit of an aside because it's not actually the subject of this passage, but it is a passage that nevertheless should move us to want to lead people to Christ wherever we can.

[18:26] And to have deep seated frustration when you present someone with the gospel and they go, I don't know, I haven't got any time for that. But which Sharon and I have family members at the moment who have that kind of attitude.

Just why would you bother? At this moment, they're still goats. So as we move on through the passage in Matthew, turn back there.

There is this statement. He says when he's come and he's there on his throne and we're all face down. And in verse 32, he will separate them from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He'll put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. Then he will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Just briefly to dwell on that statement. Many Calvinists would use this as evidence of God has decided who he's going to save before the foundation of the world.

[19:37] That is not what this passage says at all. We have to keep with the context. You see, if I let's suppose I'm the CEO of a company and I set aside in perpetuity a holiday resort.

For all my former members of staff. And as they reach retirement, they go and live in this holiday resort. I've set it aside in perpetuity. But I haven't tried to dictate who goes there.

In fact, I probably haven't a clue who will go there. Now, of course, the Lord has foreknowledge. So he knows who will and won't go there. But that's a huge distance from saying that the Lord takes away our free will and he's already decided to save us before the foundation of the world.

Therefore, you have no free will, which is a key doctrine of Calvinism. It's not true. Now, yes, he does know who will choose.

But everybody has the opportunity to choose. He hasn't already chosen that there's a load of people who don't get that opportunity. And it's so important because all of the analogies between us and the Lord are to do with marriage.

[20:51] And as I recall my own marriage and I've witnessed the marriages of others, it was a matter of choice for both parties. You had to say yes.

And we do have to say yes to the Lord. But whether we say yes or we don't say yes is a matter of our own volition. And I wanted to make that point firmly because I think at the moment, the majority of churches are Calvinist churches.

And it's a doctrine that I think just leads people astray from the truth of the gospel. So he's not dictating who will go.

He's simply providing the facilities for the sheep to go to once they're identified as sheep. Now, what do we have to do to be numbered among the sheep?

Well, according to the book of Hebrews. Now, I forgot to put a reference, but it's Hebrews 6. No, not Hebrews 6. It's Hebrews 11 and verse 6. Which on a good day, Sharon will sing to you.

[ 21 : 57 ] Because that's how she remembers it from a chap. You may have heard him, Ishmael, who used to sing songs with children. And he used to sing part of this verse as part of a song.

Hebrews 11 verse 6. Without faith it's impossible to please God. Sorry, those listening on tape. Hebrews 11 verse 6. And without faith it's impossible to please him.

For he who comes to God must, two things, right? Must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.

So to be a sheep, you have to believe that he is and also believe that he's a rewarder of those who seek him. Now, in a strange way, that doesn't mean you do what you do to get the reward.

You do what you do to demonstrate that your heart has been changed by salvation. And so the fact that you run around caring for the brothers and sisters in Christ is not something you do to get saved.

[ 23 : 07 ] It's evidence of the fact that you've been saved. More of that in a moment. So we need to believe that he is. So if you are listening to this online or anywhere and you really don't believe that he is or you're not sure, you're agnostic.

Do some research because he's the God of all gods and you don't want to be a goat. But what happens normally with the teaching of these passages or these verses is great emphasis is placed on feeding and caring for the poor.

And I've even heard it used as a sort of, well, if you don't do that, you won't be saved as a sort of ministry of works thing. But it's got nothing to do with the ministry of works saving you.

It's to do with identifying whose heart is changed and whose heart is not changed. Because the one whose heart is changed will do this automatically.

Now, go back to Matthew. Does us good to jump around the scriptures. He's saying the king is saying to those on his right. Come, you who are blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you for the foundation of the world.

[ 24 : 33 ] Then goes through for I was hungry and you gave me food and I was thirsty and you gave me drink and I was a stranger. You invited me in naked and you clothed me. And then down in verse 37, the righteous are clearly unaware of what they've done.

When did we do that, Lord? When did we feed you? When did we clothe you? And what emerges from this is the Lord said, and this is the key thing.

This is not about feeding the world. This is about feeding the brethren. When you did it not to even the least of these my brethren, you didn't do it to me.

So to understand the context, we have to ask ourselves, who are the Lord's brethren? Turn to Matthew 12.

Now, none of this, of course, means that you shouldn't feed the poor if you get a chance to. It's not giving us sanction to ignore the plight of the poor at all.

[ 25 : 42 ] There are many passages of scripture that say we should look after the poor and a passage I can't bring to mind for a moment that says we should look after the poor, especially those of the household of faith.

So we should have a larger drive to look after the brothers and sisters. But nevertheless, we should, if we can, look after all of them as part of our witnessing, as part of our preaching the gospel.

But in Matthew chapter 12, verse 46, for some reason I haven't put the verse in the notes. While he was still speaking to the crowds, behold, his mother and brothers were standing outside seeking to speak to him.

Someone said to him, behold, your mother and your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you. But Jesus answered the one who was telling him and said, who is my mother and who are my brothers?

And stretching out his hand towards his disciples, he said, and I'll include the gesticulation, which no one else would be able to get when they're listening to it online. And behold, my mother and my brothers.

[ 26 : 55 ] And he was indicating those who were gathered before him. Clearly here. And verse 50 for whoever does the will of my father who is in heaven. He is my brother and sister and mother.

He goes beyond the flesh and blood connections to a spiritual connection. And clearly he looks upon his siblings as those who are his disciples.

So in Matthew 25, in the verses that we're studying, when he says, in as much as you did it to my brethren, he's referring to all those who follow him, those who get saved.

And it clearly does not matter at this point whether these are Jews or not, because actually once we're all saved, we're all part of the church. There's a description of Jesus talking about his flock. And he says, I have sheep that are in another flock. But I'm going to bring them together into one flock under one shepherd. So the context of this is changed from the previous stuff in the chapter and is now referring to the broad panoply of people.

[ 28 : 11 ] Some of which are sheep. And some of which are goats. But in note, there is no third category. You're either one or the other.

And it seems from this passage, and I've no reason to argue with it. I mean, there are lots of other passages we could look at to show us that in Hebrews 2 verse 11, it says, He, meaning Jesus, is not ashamed to call us brethren.

In Romans 8 verse 29, he's described as the first among many brethren. And in John 13 verses 34 and 35, he tells us that our love for one another is testimony to the fact that we are his disciples.

So if you put that lot together, you've got Jesus as our big brother, and you've got Christians as those who are known to be Christians because they love one another.

Now, this gives us quite a clear demarcation where we can ask ourselves, do I care for the brethren? This might be a harsh way to put it, but if you're indifferent to coming to church, you're indifferent to the brethren.

[ 29 : 40 ] So you're indifferent to the Lord. Oh no, but I like going to church, especially when that worship leader's playing, and worship's particularly good. Do you see how easy it is to just water this down?

And what is demanded of us, and I say this not because we have to produce it out of the flesh, but because it's part of our salvation, is that we love intensely our brothers and sisters in Christ, and in doing so, we're loving the Lord himself.

Is that kind of making sense? And I don't say it to put anybody under condemnation. What I am saying though, and I speak this to myself, I do need to question sometimes when I become impatient, I'm being impatient with the Lord, because he hasn't done with this brother or sister what I wish he had done.

And I know there are loads of Christians out there who I fundamentally disagree with. They go to churches I wouldn't go to, and they say things that I think are a complete mess up of our scriptures, and yet he calls me to love them if they are brethren.

And that's a matter for discernment, isn't it? Sometimes people reveal that they're not truly brethren. But the hallmark of those who are saved is that they love the brethren, and the hallmark of those who are not is they do not love the brethren.

[ 31 : 15 ] And these people who are before the Lord, having been called out as sheep, are unaware. We did what? When did we do that?

I don't remember doing that. And that really puts it where most of us can cope with it, in that you probably didn't consider that the time you put a meal in the freezer of the family who had someone in hospital, or the time you went and hoovered somebody's house, or dug a garden, or went shopping for somebody, or just phoned somebody up and said, are you doing all right? I've heard you're going through a tough time.

All of those things are demonstrating love for the brethren. This is not an onerous thing. We must keep all of scripture embraced. And what it says in scripture very clearly is the Lord's yoke is easy and his burden is light.

It's something that you do naturally from a changed heart. If it doesn't come naturally to you, my sincere suggestion is that you get on your knees before the Lord and say, please, Lord, change my heart.

Because it should flow naturally from a changed heart. It's a visceral reaction, one from the gut.

[ 32 : 36 ] You think about it, none of us would hesitate to do these things for members of our own flesh and blood family. If I find my kids are hungry, well, I'll get you some food.

And it should be as natural with the body of Christ as it is with one another. Conversely, for someone outside the family, and we kind of experienced this with Sharon's dad, and he wasn't a

nasty man at all, but he could not understand.

We were at a campsite in Germany, and this young married couple turned up. There'd been storms in the night, and they literally poured their tent out of a bag into a big heap, and there were gallons of water.

They hadn't slept. They were absolutely dead on their feet. And we gave them food and drink. It was just, you know, God, I feel sorry for them.

Give them food and drink. It transpired. They're a Christian couple. And so there was fellowship there. Dad could not understand why you would do that for someone else's family. Now, that's what it's like when the goats are about, and the believers are suffering hunger, thirst, sickness, whatever. [ 33 : 53 ] That's not my problem. And that's to be expected from those whose hearts have not been changed. Because when you are increased, you are a new creation.

When you're not a new creation, you behave like an old creation. Turn to Acts 9. See, this passage rams home the fact that Jesus believes that when you persecute his brethren in any way, or do harm to his brethren in any way, you're actually harming him.

So verses 1 to 19. Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, in other words, Christians, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him, and he fell to the ground. We've got this glory of God again, haven't we? He's in the presence of the glory of God.

He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul might well have said, but I'm not, I just don't like these Christians.

[ 35 : 16 ] But the Lord says, no, you're persecuting me. And he said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

He's ramming the point home here. You're persecuting the church, therefore you're persecuting me. But get up and enter the city, and it will be told to you what you must do.

The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing.

And led him by the hand, and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was there three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. See, this is what happens when we are suddenly confronted with the reality of the glory of the Lord.

We can't even function. All our pride goes. There's nothing left for us to, you know, oh, if that were me, I'd have stood up.

[ 36 : 21 ] No, you wouldn't. I remember Stephen Fry once saying, if God does exist, when I get to heaven, I've got a few things I want to talk to him about.

And I'm thinking, you have no idea. You have no idea. Firstly, you're unlikely to be in heaven. But you will be before the Lord, absolutely.

And you will not be able to swear up to him and say, I've got a bone to pick with you. So, verse 10, now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias, and he said, here I am, Lord, and the Lord said to him, get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

Oh, but he was. And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to your saints at Jerusalem.

And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name. But the Lord said to him, go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.

[ 37 : 48 ] So Ananias departed and entered the house. And after laying hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized, and he took food and was strengthened. The reason I read all of that, not just the tasty bit that agrees with what I'm preaching, is that what we learn from this is, if you are persecuting or simply disparaging or casting aside or ignoring the plight of the saints, you can turn

around, and when you turn around, God will change your heart and will use you, as he did Paul, Saul who became Paul, that this is not the unthinkable sin, until that day, when there is no more opportunity to forgive that sin.

And so in keeping with all the other warnings we've had about acting immediately, and being always on the alert, and being ready, and all of that, don't remain a goat.

Because, in Lisa's words, I wonder if it will be now. You know, we could find ourselves faced with the Lord at any moment, and this attitude of couldn't care less, is the one thing that actually puts us among the ranks of the unsaved, not the saved.

Because with a transformed heart, you can't be like that. Now you can ignore the leadings of a Christian heart, which is why in Ephesians 4, verses 17 and following, we're told, put on Christ.

[ 39 : 45 ] There's a deliberate act of will to put on Christ. In other words, you've been given the gift, now go and use it. So it's a little bit like the parable of the talents.

You've been given the talent, don't go and bury it. And of course, John 13, verse 34, turned quickly there. What we read, I've already made reference to this.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, so that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love, love for one another.

So the hallmark of the believer is love for the brethren. This passage extracts that principle and says the ones who love one another, the ones who love the brethren, are the sheep.

And the ones who don't love the brethren are the goats. And that sounds really cold and very harsh and very divisive in the best sense of the word because God's the one who's doing the dividing.

[ 41 : 08 ] And I think what he is saying in all of this is you will know that you're a sheep because you love the brethren. And if you don't love the brethren, you'll know you're not. You'll know you're a goat.

I just think it gives clarity to the whole subject of salvation, which gives me only a minute to go back to Matthew 25 and look at this last bit.

And by the way, in the notes when you get them, there are loads of other scriptures that wax on about our love for each other being so vital. And also because of our love, this is the crazy one, because of our love, we will be persecuted.

But then these last few verses, he will also say to those on his left, depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

Now listen, he prepared a place in heaven for believers. He never prepared a place for unbelievers.

[ 42 : 19 ] They get to go where the devil and his angels went. So he's prepared a place for the devil and his angels and he's prepared a place for believers. We have been granted the special provision of God.

He's actually prepared. We've read it in 1 John, not 1 John, John's Gospel, chapter 14. I go to prepare a place for you. If it were not so, I would have told you.

So, there is this other place. And he says, to summarise these verses, when, you know, I was hungry, you didn't give me anything to eat.

Thirsty, you didn't give me a drink. A stranger, you didn't invite me in. Naked, you didn't clothe me.

And so on. And similarly, they are ignorant and say, when did we not do those things?

Hasn't even occurred to them. And it does not occur to the heart that is not changed. So, it, he says, as much as you didn't do it to, even the least of these, you didn't do it to me.

[ 43 : 27 ] And that verse 34, sorry, that verse 46, makes that separation. The sheep are going to, sorry, the goats are going to eternal punishment, but the sheep to eternal life.

Now, what should our response be? I think, and I have to say, having studied this and been taken aback by the severity of it.

This is where I was left with it, which is, I need to constantly, I'm not in danger of losing my salvation, but simply in order to be, for him to be pleased with me when we meet.

I need to constantly examine my heart as to whether I love the brethren, because if I don't love the brethren, I'm not loving the Lord. And that's a, and it's a difficult one.

I'm sorry to wax on, but it's a difficult one because if I don't love the brethren, it doesn't mean I've got to somehow muster up some fleshly love and go and show it to keep God off my back.

[ 44 : 37 ] It means there's something wrong with my heart. And so I need to get on my knees and say, Lord, please change my heart. Sharon did this in our marriage after we'd been saved only a

short while and she'd reached a point where she hated her husband.

And I'm very glad to say that she said to the Lord, please give me your love for Ray. And prior to getting saved, we'd both been seriously considering divorce.

But she prayed that on her own. She said, Lord, please give me your love for Ray. And I don't think we would be together today if that was not the case.

But when you find that you're struggling to love someone who is a brother, get before God and ask him to change your heart is all I can say. And if you're saved, you're saved.

I don't believe you, you know, I've got to find some way of loving them. No, no, no. What you've got to do is get the Lord to change your heart. I hope that's been useful.

[ 45 : 46 ] I did not find the study easy. Father, thank you so much for your word and for such clear direction. And Father, I do pray that it will also become a piece of ammunition we can use in evangelism.

that when people are cold-hearted, we can point out under the right circumstances that when your heart is so vehemently against God, you're numbering yourself among the sheep and their lot is not a good one.

In fact, it's awful. Lord, we thank you for this morning and I thank you for the folks gathered here.

and I pray that you will go with all of them this week and that they will have a great week in you and that you will provide them with opportunities for evangelism and for demonstrating their love to the brethren.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.