

Christ Has Done To Us
Matthew 25:31-46

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What can we learn from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ this morning? After Jesus separates the sheep from the goats, it appears that each is given their eternal reward because of what they did or did not do.

That is what most people think. In fact, most Christians erroneously believe they are going to heaven because of the good life they have lived. They infer that they have worked hard to receive God's eternal blessing, as if somehow, of their own works they are righteous. What does God declare about your "righteous works", "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away.*" (Isaiah 64:6 NIV)

It is OK to point to what you believe are your good works, look hard at them, even brag about them. But know that before God, even your righteous acts are what God calls them by the pen of Isaiah, filthy rags in God's sight.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus warns that those who count on their good works for their salvation, the goats, will be rejected. Instead of receiving an inheritance they will spend eternity with the devil and his angels. Instead of being blessed by the Father, they will be cursed and sent into the eternal fires of hell.

What are we to be doing? We are to be doing the things Jesus mentions in our text; feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, taking in strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. Jesus states that those who do such will inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. He will say to those who did not do these things, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Now, you may be confused at this point. Didn't it seem pretty evident that the blessed ones received the inheritance because they fed, gave drink, clothed, and such, the least of Jesus' brothers? Didn't the others receive eternal damnation because they did not do those things? If this is not by works, then where do they fit it?

Dearly beloved of God in Christ Jesus, the difference between the sheep and the goats is in whom they put their trust.

Those on the left, the goats, trusted themselves, or more precisely the works they had done. On the other hand, they ones on the right, the sheep, didn't even realize they had done good works. They asked, "When did we do these things to you?" They were not keeping track of their works. They meant nothing. They had not added them up and did not rely upon them.

That may have raised another question in your mind, "Does God then expect good works of His people?" The answer is of course, "YES!!!" In fact, true good works flow from the love of God

within us. Christians do not try to do them, good works simply happen. More to the point, God expects us to do them. As Christians in fact, we must do them, it is a requirement. However, good deeds do not earn us anything in God's sight.

Because God has given us the gift of faith, we cannot help but do good works. God even prepared these good works for us before we were created, that we should walk in them. Even our good works are God's gift to us, our inheritance. That is why Jesus said, "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.'" (vs 34)

Let me ask you a question. Who is it that inherits things? Children inherit things out of the love of their parents, it is their gift to the children. The kingdom of heaven is also such an inherited gift.

Jesus last words in our text say, "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." To be righteous is to be perfect. Are you perfect? Am I righteous? Think about it!

Here's the shocker. Yes! You *are* perfect! And *I am righteous* in the eyes of God. No, it is not because we have done everything that God commands us, far from it. When the Father looks at us, He does not see the filthy rags of our own deeds. Instead, He sees us clothed in the robes of Christ's righteousness we have been given - the robes cleansed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, shed on the cross and confirmed in His resurrection.

That means, that the inheritance is yours now, not only at your death, but now, today. The kingdom of heaven is yours, because God prepared it and has given it to you through the faith which His Spirit has wrought in your heart.

Christ took on our flesh, and in it He lived in perfect righteousness and holiness, living the life we cannot live. Christ took upon Himself your sinfulness - He clothed Himself in your best - the sinful rags of your sins - and gave to you His righteousness. He became sin so that you and I might become His righteousness.

Now, on the last day when you will stand before the throne, you be judged righteous, perfect, and holy. The works accredited to your account will be the deeds of Christ which He has done for you and through you. He has given you faith to trust in Him as He feeds your hunger and satisfies your thirst. In Word and Meal, Christ grants you your inheritance.

I invite you to look at this text in a new light. Who are the hungry? You are! Jesus feeds you life eternal. He feeds your faith with His Word to you, Holy Absolution and the preached word of the Gospel. Christ gives you to eat of His very own flesh and to drink of His own blood. It is a meal which feeds your eternal spiritual hunger, it strengthens your mind, your body, and your spirit to life everlasting.

Who are the thirsty? You and I! Christ quenches your thirst. After the Feast of Tabernacles in the second year of His ministry, Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38 ESV) Christ is the one doing the giving, He fills you will rivers of living water. Filled to

overflowing with the faith that trusts God.

Yes, we were thirsty, our sinful flesh was without the Spirit of God. It was in our thirst that Christ came to us as the water of life and began faith in us – even in our baptism. It is in baptism where we first drank deeply of the spiritual waters which refresh us spiritually to life everlasting.

In our text, who is the stranger Jesus refers to? You! Before God's work in you, you were a stranger to God. In the flesh, without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, you and I harbored only hatred toward God. Christ died for us while we were yet in our sins. In baptism, Christ came to you and called you His own. He not only welcomed you, but made you a part of His family - one of His beloved children. You therefore inherit a place in that kingdom, an eternal crown. How's that for loving a stranger?

Who was naked? You! Adam and Eve were placed in the garden naked, and felt no shame. It was only after their sin that they needed to be clothed, to cover their sin and guilt. Animals died by God's hand, lifeblood was shed so that they could have their sin covered. You my friends, have been clothed with righteousness. Christ comes to you and gives you His garment of salvation, the robe of His righteousness, your white robe, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. This is your eternal wedding garment, the white robe worn by the Bride of Christ, His church.

Who was sick? You know where this is going by now, you were! Sin fills you completely, like a cancer. Christ comes to you, He visits you in your sickness and gives you the medicine of healing and immortality. He speaks to you with marvelous bedside manner and tells you your sins are forgiven. He feeds you His own body and blood. By these Means of Grace, you are completely healed. Not a spot of sinful cancer remaining within you.

Who was a prisoner? That's correct - you! You were imprisoned in the bonds of your sinfulness. The guilt of your sins the chains that weighed you down. Christ comes to you and proclaims, "Your sins are forgiven, your chains loosed, your debt is paid." Christ comes and says, "I will stand before the judge in your place and take your punishment upon myself."

Dear friends in Christ, it is Jesus who has done all these things for you and me. Christ has filled us with the gifts of salvation. He feeds you still - His Word, His body, His blood! He gives you to drink of the spiritual waters of life. He calls you brother, that you might no longer remain a stranger, that you may call upon His Father, and yours.

His garment of salvation that you wear He still cleanses each week with His own blood shed upon the cross, so that you might never again be naked. He continues to visit you in your sin-sickness and heals you with but a Word of forgiveness. And although you'd like to remain a prisoner of your sinful nature, He still pleads your case before the Judge eternal.

Isn't it wonderful that you are righteous, and it isn't because of your doing, but because Christ has done it all to you? As the righteous, you will stand at His right hand. Everlasting punishment holds no terror for you or me. Instead, you are among the righteous who will go into eternal life.

Live as God's righteous, for Christ has done it for you. Amen.