

As I was preparing for this sermon, I couldn't help but think of a story I once heard from a young fullback during football season. It's not a story about what happened on the field, but while pushing a cart at HEB. He turned onto a busy isle and, immediately, he said, he found his mind slip into running back mode. He couldn't help but think about his route down the isle, how he planned to run that cart in such a way as to avoid all of the obstacles, all the other defenders with their carts, looking to put a dead stop to his. He described the whole experience as something that "just happened"; something he didn't even have to consciously think about. He turned the corner and bam: fullback mode! Why do think that happened? Because of the countless repetitions he'd done before at practice: thinking about it, executing plays, running different scenarios of how things might go down under the Friday-night-lights. The countless repetitions at practice actually turned this young man into a fullback... and not just on the field, but even in the isle at HEB, everywhere he went. Whatever the mission, whatever the goal, and especially during the season, this kid—whether he knew it or not—was learning to analyze obstacles in his path and work through the means necessary to navigate them... automatically, without even consciously thinkING about it.

It's kinda like bike riding once you get the hang of it. Or like driving a car. Think about it: how many of us consciously thought through each step of the trip on your way here this morning? Tap the unlock button, open the car door, check the mirrors, applied the seatbelt, put your foot to the brake, shifted into reverse... And let's not forget the navigation, too, right? You told yourself to turn right on Friendship, stop at a couple lights, then another right on Main Street, and another on Industrial... oops, don't forget your turn signals, the break & gas pedals, etc. None of us did that, did we? Well, maybe if you're a new driver, or maybe if you're new to the area? In that case, maybe you had to take some of those steps. But for most if not all of us we've done it so many times before that we did it without even thinking about it. In fact, driving has become such a part of our subconscious that rather than thinking about *how* to drive or *where* to turn, we can spend our whole trip here thinking about something else all together, without ever even giving a thought to what we're doing or where we're going. To put a Biblical phrase to this sort of *automata*, I'll quote Jesus: "The left hand knows not what the right hand is doing." It just happens. We just do it, without any conscious, focused effort at all.

I have a suspicion that that's the sort of "fullbacks" the Lord would have all of us become, *His* fullbacks: so full of Christ that—wherever we go, whatever corner we turn, whatever isle we're on—we're ready, we're practiced-up to honor Him, so ready that we may not even realize we're

doing it. So long have we thought about Him, watched Him, cherished Him, adored Him, listened to Him, been loved by Him... that we *follow* Him, that we *think* like Him, we cherish what He cherishes, adores what He adores, we listen patiently, love faithfully, super-naturally, and so regularly that we may even do so unknowingly, as a normal part of the overflow of His character, His Spirit living in & through us. Isn't that the sort of fullbacks we all want to be? His?!

31 The SoM will soon come in all His heavenly glory, all of heaven's angels with Him, proclaiming His fame & name, part of the parade, like the train of His glorious robe. In his letters to the church in Thessalonica, Paul wrote about Jesus' glorious return:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. –1Th4.16

in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. –2Th1.8

And what will He do when He comes in His glory? He will sit down. As Judge? Indeed, the responsibility of separating sheep & goats will be His, will be the Judges. However, do you get the sense from this passage that we're also—and perhaps, mainly—talking about another kind of *sitting*, not so much one that a judge does at a bench, but... what? Note what this Judge is sitting on: a *throne*. Who sits on a throne? A King! And not just a throne, but *HIS glorious throne*. So already, in just one verse, we see His identity blazing forward in brightness & glory: Jesus of Nazareth—of Nothing-ville, of nowhere special—is none other than *the One* foretold by ancients, the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Judge of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the One around whom all heavenly hosts gather. This is the One heaven itself sings & praises. This is the gloriously mighty & merciful One we are all waiting for. And we are told—we are *promised*—that very soon our King will come again seated on His glorious throne.

32-33 When the King comes to sit on His throne, angels won't be the only ones gathered around Him. Who else will be before Him? *We* will be! ALL nations! All peoples. Only Gentiles? NO! Jews & Gentiles. Only believers? NO! Believers and non-believers... well, sort of. I mean I guess you could call everyone a “believer” on that day, because, when He returns, there will be absolutely NO DOUBT as to who He is and why He has come. ALL will believe that day. But for many it will be *too little, too late*. All will stand before the King of kings. And the ground will be absolutely leveled before Him. We may cherish and prize pop-stars, professional athletes,

presidents & kings of the earth, but on that day... *all* will be leveled, humbled before His majesty... some with such joyful humility, others in absolute fear & dismay.

Back in those days and in that region, shepherd knew that during the warmth of the day the sheep and goats may mingle together, but just before the coolness of night, they would have to gather the goats together for warmth, separated from the sheep who were better “clothed”—so to speak—for the coolness of the night air. During the day time, if pastures didn’t have enough to graze on, shepherds again would separate the goats from the sheep. That’s the picture of the scene set before us by the Good Shepherd today. Like the wheat & tares which Jesus said *must grow up together until the day of harvest*, so all the goats & sheep were mingled together. But upon His return, when He takes His seat on His glorious throne, they will be separated once for all. HE will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. The “right” side represents the place of power and honor. The left side... not so much.

34-40 Don’t you love the King’s humility here? Up to this point, there will have been no greater moment of the Son’s glory ever on earth. All history points to this moment. All of creation has been groaning for this moment, longing for the King’s redemption on the day of His return. This is it! This is the climax of His-Story. This is the Son of God’s most glorious moment that we’ve all been waiting for. If ever there was a moment for Him to absorb all the spotlight, it’s here, it’s now. And yet, who does He credit for the happiness of His people? Who does the Son point to as *the Blessor* of His sheep? His *Father*. His Father! This whole plan of glory, of life, of light, of joy, of eternal gladness is the Father’s doing! Oh how often we’ve seen this wonderful characteristic of our Christ throughout Matthew’s account of the Gospel, always associating the Son’s acts, His works, His wonders with His Father, always crediting His Father for all He does:

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” -11.25-27

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. -16.17

Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. -18.19

Who blesses the sheep? The Father does! The sheep are blessed to have God for their Father. God has provided them an inheritance. And here now, upon Christ's return, the Good Shepherd separates the sheep to His right side where their inheritance awaits them. How long has this inheritance belonged to them? From the moment the Father called them to belong to Him. This Kingdom has been prepared for them *from the foundation of the world*. In other words, to dwell among His people has been the Father's plan from the beginning! And now is the time!

Why are these sheep welcomed and invited to take up their inheritance? According to this passage, what does Jesus put forward as the reason they receive it? It's actually pretty obvious, isn't it? "Hyper-grace" folks may have some difficulty admitting as much, but I'm quite convinced that's only because they don't understand exactly what's going on here. According to the Good Shepherd, why are sheep welcomed & invited to take up their inheritance? He states it plainly: because of the way they treated His brothers—even the least of them. "Whoa, now wait a minute," some will say. "That sounds a lot like a works salvation to me. Are you telling me that they will inherit the Kingdom of God based on works, based on the works they did, how they treated others during their lives, how well they behaved?" Well, sort of. If it walks like a duck, and talks like a duck, right? Or I guess a sheep in this case, huh?

But didn't Paul tell us that salvation is by faith alone, and not by works? Yes, he did. And He was & is absolutely right! But in 2Co5.10 Paul also said this:

...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

I'm not trying to confuse you here, and I don't think Paul or Jesus are either. The reason Jesus provided for the sheep's admission into their inheritance is based upon *evidence* here, not *cause*. In other words, their works are NOT the reason they are welcomed, their works simply evidence, attest, witness to who they are, to their identity, that they truly are the children of God, the sheep of His pasture, those for whom the Kingdom has been prepared from the foundation of the world.

Did you notice that, before the sheep can even ask, "But why, Jesus? Why should we be welcomed in Your Kingdom," Jesus had already put forward the answer? "For I was hungry and you gave Me food..." And what does Jesus say will be their response? "You dang right, brutha! 'Bout time somebody recognize around here!" NO! Not at all. Rather than expecting His commendation for their works, they're surprised, aren't they? V37 "Then the righteous will answer him, saying, '[But] Lord, when did we see you hungry and fee you..." If they were

working for their salvation... if salvation was something that they or we could earn by works, they wouldn't be surprised, they'd be expecting it. But instead they are surprised. And Jesus assures them that all of their deeds done in His love—in His manner, in His character, by His Spirit dwelling in and working through them—all of those deeds done to the least of His brothers was just the same as deeds done to Jesus Himself, done for our Lord. And the same can be said vice-versa: all refusal to help the King's family down through the years was really a refusal to help the King Himself. All the love shown by the sheep for Jesus' brothers—their aid and care for King Jesus, essentially—proves, attests, reveals, displays, shows, evidences that the Spirit of Christ was and is in them. Such belong to Him, are His very own family members.

41-45 Wow! This is severe, weighty condemnation isn't it. The goats are cursed by the King of kings, removed from His glorious sight forever, banished to eternal fire, the fire of hell prepared for the devil and his demons. That is where they belong. That is the eternal destination of those who spent a lifetime—not just committing sins, but—omitting themselves from righteousness, omitting themselves from helping the least of Jesus' brothers. They, too, are surprised, aren't they? Perhaps there is a bit more to note about the shock of the sheep and goats?

It's interesting, isn't it: neither the sheep nor the goats seem to be shocked about their eternal assignments. The sheep aren't shocked about going to heaven, nor are the goats shocked about their condemnation to hell. That's not what they appear to be shocked about. What shocks them is the reason Jesus gives for *why* they are commended or condemned. It's as if Jesus says, "The reason they deserve this or that can be clearly seen in Exhibit A: How they treated my brothers." The test Jesus puts forward as evidence is really one of *authenticity* or *hypocrisy*, isn't it? If the goats thought they could earn heaven by their treatment of the least of these, then surely they would have acted compassionately. But for how long? And from what motive? Clearly it's not so much a *kind act* Jesus is interested in here, but a *kind of person*, the whole person, one whose heart has been transformed by His own heart; and from a transformed heart follows a transformed mind, body and relations with others. This sort of person doesn't just do a compassionate act here or there; they don't just go on a short term mission to check some spiritual box, tow some spiritual line, or pass some religious assessment test. No, the person of Jesus' kind—of His character, of His sort—lives on mission, they're always on call, they're always ready to give a defense or a cup of cold water, an encouraging word, a visit to a hurting friend, a meal to the new mother, clothing to a needy sibling in the Lord. It's just another day in the life of Christ, not a flag to raise or a banner to wave: "Hey, look at me... over here, check out this righteous act I did. See I told you I was real.

I told you I deserved to be in leadership. Told you!” Not at all. The humbled child of the Most High is so regularly at their Master’s feet, so often at His Word, so routinely noting His kindness, His compassion and character as seen in the Scriptures and experienced in their own lives that His will and way simply rubs off on them as they follow in His footsteps, as they trust & obey. They most likely don’t even know when they’re doing it. His Spirit just moves in & through them with regularity and power. The left hand doesn’t even take note of what the right hand is doing. Like the fullback in the HEB isle, it’s just who he is, it’s automatic. A need pops up, a hurt is revealed, a sorrow is surfaced and... just like that, it’s addressed, it’s prayed over, it’s ministered to, it’s taken care of. No need for a parade. No need for attention. It’s just the power of the Spirit of Holiness working through a salvaged sinner longing for his Lord’s return.

To those who have little sympathy for the Gospel, for the Good News of Jesus, to those who remain indifferent to the cause of Christ, in that last Day it will be shown that they have not only rejected the least of Christians, but in doing so it will be shown that they have rejected Christ the King!

On the other hand, true disciples are concerned for Christ, even for the littlest sparrows that His eyes are upon. They love His creation. They love one another, they feed one another, they minister compassion, aid, comfort, prayer and help even to the least among them. And, in so doing, one Day very soon they will discover that all of their little, seemingly insignificant services of love and compassion were done—not only to the littlest & least, but—to Christ Himself.

PRAYER

SONG: *What Wondrous Love Is This*

COMMUNION

SONG: *Amazing Grace*

BENEDICTION: *Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. –2Co13.11*