

My dad had Perry Mason. This generation has Law and Order. The courtroom drama is a regular on television. Watch for only a short time and you'll feel like an expert on objections, evidence, and testimony. You'll know the major players as well as the rules of conduct. With so many different courtroom drama shows it's no wonder we have such a fascination with trials as well as know so much about them.

For a society that knows so much about the criminal justice system, guilt, innocence, and punishment it really is a society that on the whole would like to deny eternal punishment. Back in the summer of 2008 Pew Forum released a survey where only 59% said they believed in hell. One nineteen year old was quoted as saying that hell was a choice. *"The Lord gives you the choice of whether or not you want to spend eternity separated from him, or in love and comfort and peace."* Fewer people believe hell exists and even more believe we have the choice on going there or not.

When Jesus told the parable of the sheep and the goats that Matthew wrote down in his gospel he was clearly stating a judgment was coming. There would be one final courtroom scene. But it wouldn't go down like the courtroom dramas of our favorite television series. Hell and heaven exist, but how we get there is different than mainstream Americans might think. Jesus clears it up for us when he describes the Last Judgment.

**Last Judgment means a happy day  
In glory Jesus separates all people  
In glory Jesus shows the evidence**

Everything in a courtroom is laid out to show who is in charge. All the chairs and tables are pointed to the front. Usually higher than all the others one chair is placed behind a large platform desk. Only one person sits in that chair. He or she wears a robe and doesn't go by their name. They're called judge or your honor. They have all the power and authority in that courtroom. The scene is familiar to what Jesus describes, **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory."** Only one can sit on this throne. Only one deserves the glory. Only one can have every eye focused on him. He is the Son of Man, Jesus.

Then the division takes place; a great big division into two groups. Not three or four. Not one. Two groups, one to the right of the Son of Man and the other to his left. There's no gray area on that day. No second chances, no arguments will be heard for leniency. For a long time sheep and goats lived together here on earth. They looked very much alike. They did similar things all throughout history. But on Last Judgment day there'll be a major difference. **"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"** Only one group hears those words.

Tolerance and fairness rule the day. The world wants to believe that judgment just can't be. Last Judgment sounds terrible. The idea that people will head off to hell with no recourse, no appeals to file, and no hope for change seems unfair. We might even join those shouting for fairness thinking that our loving God is too loving to send people to hell. Wouldn't it be much nicer of God to offer these people one more chance? What about that aunt or uncle you were unsure about because they never talked about Jesus but you assumed were Christian? That friend who never went to church and never showed signs of believing but you knew was doing good things? Or that coworker who always said he would have his last words with God and felt confident he could argue his way in. At the separation of all people we might look at those on the left and think Last Judgment isn't so happy.

I'm here to tell you on that day you'll be sheep standing to the right of Jesus. Last Judgment is going to be happy when Jesus separates all people into two groups. Our Savior returns to judge us then, but the judgment is set now. Jesus shared it with us in advance so we know what's coming. **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."** Sinners who have no right to expect anything good from God have been brought to God by Christ. We're told of an inheritance already ours in Christ. Not by right or by earning it, it's ours by grace through Christ. So on Judgment Day we stare not into the face of an angry judge, but into the face of a friend and Savior. Our best interests are in his heart. Nothing more needs to be done. Jesus has said and done everything to save us from our sins. Last Judgment is going to mean a happy day for us.

When you watch shows on television about courtroom dramas you know the pattern they follow. Someone has a charge brought against them. Then they bring forward a whole long list of witnesses and evidence to try and win over the jury to convict or acquit the person. The evidence comes first and then the verdict. In God's courtroom it's different. On the last day all people will gather before him. A separation takes place and all people are split into two groups by Jesus. They are given their verdict already. Then in glory Jesus shows the evidence.

God doesn't need the evidence to ensure you're in the right place for eternity. It's not presented for God's benefit. Immediately upon death the soul was already in heaven or hell. That happened silently and mysteriously behind the scenes. On the Last Day everything is made public. Evidence that people can see and understand is presented. For those on the right the evidence is simple, not sensational. Some help offered, some love shown, visits made. The good works are not cited to make someone think they earned their spot on the right. These were works of love that sprang from faith, done because they loved the King. More importantly the King loved them.

What Jesus will say to those on his left won't sound as nice. **"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."** The eternal fire wasn't originally meant for those on the left. They're not on the left because they committed murder, rape, or stealing. They missed the basics. Yet that's not why they're going to hell. Jesus died for every one of their sins. The God of all grace wanted to share all the blessings of his grace with them. They were in contact with people who knew Jesus or spoke about Jesus. They saw the power of God in the creation. They heard their conscience and knew God existed. Yet they regarded it all as foolish. They rejected and didn't believe. Their lack of works simply showed they deserved hell.

Isn't it interesting the two groups ask the same question? **"Lord, when did we...?"** The believers couldn't remember because they weren't keeping track. They weren't trying to earn God's love. Good works flowed because they knew Christ's love. The unbelievers couldn't remember not doing those things. They thought all through life they were doing good. Outside things may have looked good. They came to church, gave generous offerings, even lived a better life than most. They were expecting God to judge them by their works. If you are following those ideas you won't find assurance or comfort. If you're trusting in something other than Christ to be saved you'll find yourself at the Last Judgment on the left.

Good works will be a mark of your life. Trusting in Jesus by faith always brings out works. They are faith in action, a natural part of our life, and a confession of our hidden faith. No matter how lowly the works seemed, no matter how small the faith from which they flowed, your works are great and precious to Jesus because of his grace. Not one righteous person's sins are mentioned by Jesus. Mercifully we'll stand before God and not hear about one time when we weren't quite what God makes us out to be. We can rest secure knowing we're clean from all sins in Christ. God's son lived the perfect life for you and paid the penalty you owed for those sins. That's true today and on the Last Day. Jesus in glory will present the evidence at the Last Judgment for your assurance and comfort.

Two groups will stand before Jesus on the Last Day in judgment. **"Then [those on his left] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."** Heaven and hell are real places and people will really go there. Each person's works will be shown to demonstrate they're going to the right place. Those going off to hell are because they didn't believe in their Savior's perfect life and innocent death. Those who are off to heaven are only going there because of their Savior's perfect life and innocent death. For us who are being saved, for us who trust in Christ, Last Judgment will be a happy day.