

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HEAR?

Matthew 25:31-46 Text vs. 46 *"They will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

As American servicemen were coming home from World War II a sailor called his parents from San Diego to say he was bringing a buddy home with him. "You see Mom, my friend's in pretty bad shape. He was severely wounded and has only one arm, one leg, and one eye. I thought he could come live with us." After a few moments of silence, the mother finally said, "Of course, let him come and stay with us." But from the hesitancy in her voice, the sailor realized his parents would not want to be burdened with a handicapped person for very long. Two days later, his parents received a telegram informing them their son had jumped from a hotel window in San Diego. When they received his body, it had one arm, one leg, and one eye, and his mother said, "If only I had known! "

So, on the Day of Judgment, don't you be the one saying, "IF ONLY I HAD KNOWN!" "If only I had known helping others was really helping Jesus." "If only I had known serving others was really serving Christ." If you know that now, why not begin living your life differently so you will hear, *"Come, you that are blessed by My Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* Or you could hear, *"You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus took the everyday life of a shepherd and applied deep symbolism to it. He made it so clear. It was as if He had painted a picture in black and white to show that all people fall into one of two categories. Figuratively, they are either sheep, or they are goats. Sheep are the righteous. The ones who will sit at the right hand of God in the place of honor. And it's obvious who the goats are. The difference between sheep and goats is easy to understand. Years ago, a country church invited a young preacher to deliver their Sunday morning sermon. And he had to walk twenty miles to do it. Tired and hungry, the young preacher faltered and floundered through his sermon. People didn't respond. And they didn't know he had walked twenty miles just to get there. When the service was over, no one offered him food, or a place to rest. So, he started back down his long road home with a broken heart. A Black janitor of an all-white church saw him and asked him to share a simple meal with him in a nearby shed. Years passed. The young preacher was now Bishop of world-wide denomination standing once more in the same pulpit to dedicate what had now become a great country church. The whole community was there. It was a great event in their life. When the service ended, many crowded around the Bishop to offer compliment after compliment, but the Bishop waved them all aside when he saw the old Black janitor who had befriended him years ago. He called him over and said, "Years ago, when I was here, I was dejected and depressed and you offered me your friendship. I've never forgotten that! Today, I want to spend my time here, with you!"

And could it be that God will someday say to you, *"I want to spend eternity with you!"* That's a wonderful example of the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. It's found only in Matthew's Gospel, and it shines a bright light on some of Jesus' deepest and most powerful teachings. It gives you a picture of the *Final Judgment* in which all people who have ever lived in this world will be judged. It's the *Judgment* you will face someday! And what's the requirement? Jesus shared it in Matthew 25. You must be on the side of the sheep at the final Judgment by having a deep relationship with Jesus Christ, the direct descendant of King David. He's Messiah! The anointed One! And He will inherit David's throne. He will become the King of Kings over the whole world and take up that position when it's time to separate the sheep from the goats. And it's your commitment to Him, as Lord of your life, that will help when you meet those who have needs on the street, in the store, or in your neighborhood.

It's the same ministry Jesus taught about the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37. He stopped to help a Jewish man who had been beaten up by thieves and gave selflessly to the man, even though they were enemies. The injured man couldn't give anything in return. Jesus calls people like him *"sheep"*. And the Samaritan ministered to that *"sheep"* without ever stopping to make sure he got recognized or reimbursed for his act of kindness. He didn't do it to be good. Or to please God. Or to gain a reward. He did it because he saw a need. And he met that need! He responded to someone who was in need. And that's why Jesus said, when you serve the lonely, the outcast, and the insignificant, you are serving Him. You have become someone who has chosen to live the lifestyle Jesus called His followers to live. You're focused on living that kind of life without developing ambitious motives for your service. Still, it's possible to be committed to Christ, yet take your eyes off Him and lose your focus. Motives can become twisted. They can become ungodly motives that allow someone to prosper for "helping" others. And there are many people who sincerely reach out to help others for the right motives yet are taken advantage of by that individual they're trying to help. Don't let a few people like that destroy the love Jesus has placed in your heart for doing acts of kindness. They're never done in vain!

But one of the dangers you run into when you study the parable of the sheep and the goats is, folks can easily get the idea that what you're doing is what some call *"works of righteousness"*. You're being made righteous by doing "good" things. Listen, righteousness only comes through Jesus' works. Not yours! The book of Isaiah says in 64:6 that the greatest deeds that you do are only filthy rags in God's sight. *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away."* (Isaiah 64:6 NIV)

So, there's no such thing as a pure motive. All plans can be corrupted with sin. If it were possible for you to have absolute pure motives and actions, then Jesus would not have had to give His life for you. You could just "act" or "think" your way into a right relationship with God. But that's impossible! Jesus died so that your sin might be forgiven! It's by faith, and trust in Him, that He lives through you. So, when you're called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and give water to the thirsty, you're letting Jesus to do that *through you*. It's important for you to understand that! Because if you don't understand that, you're going to be disappointed by your "good" acts of service. It can't be you doing it! It must be Jesus doing it, through you!

There was a TV show in the 1970's called "*Kung Fu*". It was about a Chinese monk skilled in the art of *Kung Fu*, the martial arts, the fighting sports of East Asia. In the TV show, actor David Carradine was an eager *kung fu* student called "grasshopper". He was "a man of peace," but you could count on him to beat up the bad guys at least twice in each show. One technique of the program's storytelling was flashbacks. When Carradine was the young student of a blind Master, the Master called him "grasshopper." In one flashback, "grasshopper" was standing in a line to give a gift of flowers to the blind teacher. But before he could give his gift, another student in front of him had a similar gift of flowers but was rejected and turned away. Sadly, "grasshopper" turned away fearing rejection. But the master called to him, "Grasshopper, why do you turn away?" "Because you rejected another student with the same gift." "Oh, you don't understand," the old teacher said. "He did not bring his gift because he loved me. He brought his gift to gain influence and to buy my approval. You brought your gift out of love. That's the gift I desire."

Now, think about that! Think about what you want to hear on your day of judgment. Will it be, "*Come, you that are blessed by My Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Or are you going to hear, "*You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*" I pray that's not what you will hear, but that you will hear, "*Come, you that are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" And I pray that you will also hear, ³¹ "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ 'Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*" ³⁷ "*Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*" ⁴⁰ "*The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*"

That's what I want you hear on that day!

May it be so! AMEN