

Sheep and Goats: How Do We Serve God?

(Matthew 25:31-46)

I. Introduction

- A. Nervous bride decided to have favorite verse on wedding cake— **1 John 4:18**
1. This text proclaims “*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear*”
 - a. The caterer called to ask, “*Are you sure John 4:18 is the right verse?*”
 - b. She assured him it was; cake was engraved with **John** (not **1 John**) **4:18**
The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband
 2. We all know it’s easy to get mixed-up and confused when reading the Bible
 - a. There are parts which are complex, problematic and hard to understand
 - b. We come across those sometimes, but then Mark Twain had it right—
Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand
- B. What do you think is the hardest, most difficult text in the Bible?
1. Well, that largely depends what you mean by hardest of most difficult
 - a. **OBSCURE**: Imagery of Revelation or the “*baptism for the dead?*”
 - b. **DEEP**: The doctrine of Trinity or Paul’s view of the Jews in Romans.
 - c. **OBTUSE**: Leviticus’ sacrificial instructions or point of the genealogies
 - d. **APPLICATION**: Commands in Sermon on Mount (“*turn other cheek*”)
 2. It can be argued that today’s is the toughest text— **Matthew 25:31-46**
 - a. Really? The parable of the sheep and goats is the hardest text? Maybe!
 - b. Last week, we looked briefly at Paul statement on salvation (**Eph 2:8-9**)
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
 - c. No one really likes grammar, but we do have to get the prepositions right
 - 1) We are saved **BY GRACE**—the free gift of God given at the cross
 - 2) We are saved **THROUGH FAITH**—not our perfect performance
 - 3) We are saved **FOR GOOD WORKS**— obedience is the result of faith
 3. It’s easy to get the propositions mixed up, right? Saved **BY** good works?
 - a. But we have it straight—**BY** grace, **THROUGH** faith, **FOR** good works
 - b. Well, it’s all clear until we come across Jesus parable of sheep and goats

II. Sheep and Goats: The Text (Reading: Matthew 25:31-46)

- A. On the surface, there are three basic points I see stressed in this parable—
1. **First**, God takes note of how we treat other people who are in need
 - a. The sheep fed the hungry, clothed the naked, housed the homeless, etc.
 - b. The goats are those who ignored the same needs of the same people!
 - c. Jesus divides the lost and saved based on how they treated others!
 2. **Second**, serving people is important because that is how we serve God.
 - a. Jesus took this business of caring for the poor very personally.
 - b. Think about it—what is it that we can really do for God?
 - 1) Really can give God nothing; cattle on 1000 hills are his (Psalm 50)
 - 2) But when we care for the ones He loves, we are serving him!
 - c. God takes great delight when his children care for each other!
 3. **Point**: This parable, unlike most of the NT, sees salvation based on works
 - a. Those on the right are saved, not because of beliefs, but because of works
 - b. Is this the toughest text in the NT? Maybe not if you look at the context
- B. In Matthew 25, three parables answer three questions about the end of time.
1. **Question 1**: How can we know when Jesus will come? **Parable of Virgins**
 - a. **Story**: Ten virgins were bridesmaids who led the wedding procession.
 - b. Foolish virgins were unprepared when the bridal party was delayed.
 - c. **Point**: We can't know when the second coming will be—get ready!
 2. **Question 2**: How can we be ready when Jesus comes? **Parable of Talents**
 - a. Two servants used the talents that they were given to serve the master.
 - b. One servant refused to use his talent, and he was the one condemned.
 - c. **Point**: We are prepared for the second coming by using our talents.
 3. **Question 3**: How can we use our talents to serve God? **Sheep-and-Goats**
 - a. We tend to view our gifts and talents as selective and unbalanced.
 - 1) We know God give natural talents and spiritual gifts, but not to me.
 - 2) We see ourselves as one talent people (*absolves us of responsibility*)
 - b. Parable of sheep and goats reminds us that we all can serve powerfully.
 - c. Our opportunities to use our talents are wrapped up in helping people.

III. Sheep and Goats: Application

- A. Parable of sheep and goats reminds us how we are to show our faith
1. We are saved by grace through faith—salvation is the work of God.
 - a. We can never be perfect; we can never do enough to earn God’s love
 - b. Salvation is in the cross; once we believe that, then we are called to obey
 2. Get this straight— God does not require us to be perfect... or even close
 - a. He doesn’t expect us to be perfect in every moral/ethical choice we make
 - b. When we believe in Jesus, God treats that as righteousness (**Rom 4:3**)
Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.
 - c. Faith does lead to obedience; faith without works is dead. (**Jam 2:26**)
As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
 3. God doesn’t expect us to be perfect; He does expect that we’ll act on faith
- B. Almost from beginning, the church has equated obedience with our doctrine.
1. We show our faithfulness by our correct views on important issues.
 - a. Why do churches split over things that aren’t even connected to gospel?
 - b. Because right churches are right because they have the right doctrine
 - 1) You can’t just claim to believe in Jesus; faith without works is dead
 - 2) You show your faith by commitment to truth—holding true doctrine
 2. **Irony:** Sometimes we stress believing right things more than doing them!
 - a. Several years ago, one of my recurring preaching nightmares came true
 - 1) I was preaching and in walked Jerry Jones (*homiletics professor at HU*)
 - 2) It turned out OK; he liked my sermon (B-) and we had a good chat
 - 3) He was in process writing a book on marriage-divorce-remarriage
 - a) Most churches hold “*traditional view*” but don’t enforce (*too messy*)
 - b) But they insist people hold traditional view to be seen as faithful!
 - b. Faithfulness is holding the right view on doctrine, not living doctrine!
 3. Jesus gives a difference standard of faithfulness— loving other people
 - a. You don’t love the unseen God without loving others (**1 John 4:20**)
 - b. Why? Because when we act to love God’s children, we love God!
“whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”
 - c. Parable of the sheep-n-goats refocuses us on what it means to obey

C. In fact, let's just revisit what James says on faith and works (**James 2:14-17**).

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1. Obedience gives life to our faith; so without works, faith is dead.
 - a. But this isn't about doctrine—not baptism, church music or organization
 - b. The works here that makes our faith alive is how we treat others!
 - c. That sounds suspiciously like Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats.
2. Conservative churches often treat social issues as something of an option
 - a. It's good to help others, but the church is really about salvation.
 - b. Liberals are condemned for abandoning salvation for social gospel.
 - c. **Irony**: Jesus says that helping others is about salvation... ours!
3. We don't earn heaven by doing good, but we show we're serious about it!

IV. Conclusion

A. Our faith in Jesus is supposed to make a difference in how we live

1. Jesus' basic invitation to his disciples (and therefore us) is "*Follow me!*"
2. Remember Jesus washing the apostles' feet? *What was the point of that? I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.* (**John 13:15**)
 - a. How do we know we're really in Christ? John asks that in **1 John 2:5**.
 - b. Answer in v. 6, "*Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did*"

B. Faith should must make a difference in how we live, how we treat other people

1. One of my Facebook buddies wrote this Monday after Super Bowl
How many people who claim to put God first, stayed home last night to watch the Super Bowl? If we claim to put God first and we really do not, I believe that we are sinning.
 - a. He's right. We can't just claim to put God first; we must put Him first
 - b. Church attendance is important, but it's really about what we **SAY**
 - 1) We come together sand sing songs and say prayers—what we **SAY**
 - 2) At church we proclaim our faith and we have faith strengthened
2. But putting God first is about what we **DO** after we leave church!
 - a. Faith must make a difference in how we live—how we treat others
 - b. Leave you with a question, "*What difference is faith making out there?*"