

PARABLE: SHEEP AND GOATS

Matthew 25:31-46

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Jesus; in the parable: sheep and goats

Key-location: Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- What people did versus what others did not do: sheep (Mat 25:34-39); goats (Mat 25:41-45).
- Judgment pronounced: on the blessed (Mat 25:34, 46); on the cursed (Mat 25:41, 46).
- Separation: sheep from the goats (Mat 25:32); right from left (Mat 25:32); blessed from cursed (Mat 25:46); eternal punishment from eternal life (Mat 25:46).

Key-attitudes:

- Jesus' serenity as he told the parable.
- Jesus' supreme glory.
- Righteous people's joyful surprise at what they had done for Jesus.
- Cursed people's disappointed shock at what they neglected to do for Jesus.

Initial-situation:

Jesus was in the last week of his life. He was in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. On Sunday before Passover, Jesus made his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. On Monday, Jesus expelled those who were buying and selling in the temple. Religious leaders began looking for a way to kill him. Tuesday morning was filled with confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders.

On Tuesday afternoon, Jesus was alone with his disciples. They wanted to know what would be the sign that Jesus was coming again, and when would the world come to an end (Mat 24:3). Jesus told several parables that illustrated some aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven, his second coming and when the world would come to an end.

Initial-problem:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the people from all the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate the people, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Final-situation:

Those cursed by God will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous go to eternal life.

BIBLE STORY

Jesus was speaking about his coming again and the end of the world. He told this parable, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the people from all the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate the people, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left.

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Enter you who are blessed by my Father. Possess the kingdom prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your homes. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

"Then the righteous people will answer the king, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcomed you into our homes, or needing clothes and clothed you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

"The king will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of these brothers or sisters of mine, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.'

"Then the king will say to the goats on his left, 'You who are cursed by God, get away from me. Go into the eternal fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me into your homes. I needed clothes and you gave me no clothes. I was sick and in prison and you never visited me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or needing clothes, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'

"The king will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you didn't do for one of my brothers or sisters, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you didn't do it for me.'

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Mat 25:31-46).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What coming event does the parable deal with?
2. What are the actions that Jesus will use as the basis of his judgment upon people?
3. Who was Jesus referring to when he spoke of the least, or those who seem unimportant?
4. How does Jesus interpret the actions of a person toward others?

5. What does this parable teach about the judgment that will take place when Jesus returns?
6. When have you been hungry, thirsty, a stranger, in need of clothes, sick, or imprisoned and someone helped you?
7. How have you reached out to help people with those needs?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **The parable of the Sheep and Goats teaches that the way we serve Jesus' followers in need is a mirror of the way we serve Jesus** (Mat 25:31-46). Evidence of our belief in Jesus is the way we treat his followers. Jesus considers that what one does to his followers is done to him. Giving a cup of cold water to a follower of Jesus is the same as giving it to Jesus himself (Mk 9:41). In contrast, causing one of his followers to sin is an offense against Jesus (Mk 9:42).
2. **Good deeds should be so much a part of a person's character that he is unaware that he is doing them.** In the parable of the Sheep and Goats, those who performed good works were unaware that they had done them (Mat 25:37-39).
3. **Jesus will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers.** The unbelievers and pretenders will go to a place of everlasting punishment. The righteous will have eternal life in God's presence (Mat 25:46).
4. **Jesus is the supreme judge.** Jesus will return as the judge who will separate people into two groups (Mat 25:32). He will reward the righteous who are approved by God (Mat 25:34-40, 46). He will condemn and punish those who are cursed by God (Mat 25:41-46).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):
Invite listeners to pray about the story in "twitter" length prayers. Tell God:
 - How they feel about the story.
 - Decisions they need to make as a result of hearing the story.
 - How the story helps them to know God better.
2. **Pantomime Retelling of the Story:**
The storyteller tells the story one time. Then the storyteller:
 - Asks for two volunteers to pantomime the different classifications of people – the sheep and the goats. Each selected person will pantomime the part of the story that deals with his classification as the story is retold.
 - Retells the story with the participants pantomiming their part at the appropriate time.
 - Invites a listener to retell the story.