Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide

Matthew 25:31-46

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| History, Culture, & Context |

This section of Matthew is known as both the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats and the Judgement of the Nations. This is the final parable in the Book of Mathew and a story about the final judgement.

Verses 31-33 read, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” Jesus used sheep and goats to illustrate the difference between believers and unbelievers. Ezekiel 34:17-24 makes a similar separation between sheep and goats.

According to the Book of Matthew Shepherds Notes: “Sheep were the prominent animals in the sacrificial system of Israel. They were also a valuable source of food and clothing. Goats are destructive to vegetation and contribute to erosion, as they tear plants out of the soil. Sheep and goats grazed in the same pasture, and freely mingled. From a distance, they often looked similar in appearance. But it was necessary for Palestinian shepherds to separate the herds because male goats were often hostile toward the sheep. In His parable of the sheep and goats, sheep symbolize God’s righteous people, and goats symbolize the unrighteous.”

After illustrating those that are separated, this story then details how common kindness for one another will affect our standing in the final judgement before God. Verses 34-36 discuss how those on His right (sheep) provided for Him when He was in need. Specifically, “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, 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.”

Verses 37-39 have those on the right respond to Jesus confused as to when they provided for Him. Jesus responds in verse 40, “…‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” In a similar style, Jesus tells those on His left (goats) that they did not help Jesus in His times of need. When they asked when that might have happened, Jesus replies in a similar way as He did to those on His right, “whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

Verse 46 concludes with, ““Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

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| Questions to Consider |

1. Compare and contrast the sheep from the goats. What is the main point of this parable?
2. What specific acts of mercy can we do every day to fulfill what love requires of us?