

Be Ready: Be Sheep

Matthew 25:31-46

Introduction

In the parable of the 10 Virgins, we learned that the wisdom of the wise was that they had extra oil for their lamps. The oil is faith, so being wise means to keep our lives stocked up with faith. We do this by remaining in the **WORD** and **SACRAMENT**. Last week, we learned that the faithful servants had a different attitude toward their master. They were good and faithful because they loved and respected their master and wanted to please him. Whoever loves God and is faithful to Christ will be ready whenever He returns. Whoever does not love God and is not faithful to Christ will not be ready and will be condemned to *“Outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30)*. Today, we see the Son of Man is separating all the people of the world like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep go into eternal life and the goats into eternal punishment. So, if we are to be ready, we must be sheep. What’s the difference between sheep and goats? What does it mean to be a sheep? How can we be sheep and thus be ready?

Analogy, Not Parable

The first thing to notice about this reading is that it is not a parable, as the others were. *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory ...” (v.31)*. Jesus is saying, “We’ve been talking about being ready when I return. Now, this is what it’s going to be like when that happens.” He is describing an actual, historical, future event. All the nations will be gathered before His throne and He will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Here is the analogy we want to unpack today— *“as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”*

Sheep & Goats

Why does the shepherd separate the sheep from the goats? Don’t they get along? A shepherd will run his sheep with the goats all day on the hillside. But in the evening, goats, not having the same type of hair as sheep, are more susceptible to the cold and must be kept in where it’s warm. They are separated for their own good. But here, Jesus is using the analogy of sheep and goats to represent two similar, yet different types of people. Before, we had the wise and unwise, the faithful and unfaithful, now it’s sheep and goats. What makes the difference?

Two Types—Righteous & Unrighteous

Throughout the lesson, Jesus tells us what that difference is. The sheep are the righteous and the goats are the unrighteous. But here comes the problem. Do our actions make us righteous and earn us salvation? **Verses 40** and **45** have been used to say that we will be found righteous or unrighteous because of how we treated the poor and needy. *“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”* And *“Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”* Some see this as a call for social justice. Is this merely that?

Clothed in Christ's Righteousness

The obvious answer is, "No." It is not merely a call to social justice nor is it saying we are made righteous by our actions. *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. Christ took our sin upon Himself when He was on the cross. Taking our sins, He was able to give us His righteousness. *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philippians 3:8-9)*. Righteousness doesn't come from the Law and good works, but through faith in Christ. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27)*. At Baptism, we put on Christ and are clothed in His righteousness. This is the righteousness of being sheep.

Righteousness shown in Actions

But what about all the talk about caring for others? Good works are the **fruit** of righteousness. Jesus said, *"The tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33)*. There are subtle differences between sheep and goats. A sheep's tail usually hangs down, while a goat's tail sticks up. If a sheep has horns, they are usually more curved than a goat's horns. Sheep have wool and goats have straight hair. Sometimes, these differences aren't obvious. But they are to a shepherd because he knows his sheep. Non-Christians can and do sometimes care for the poor and needy. But those actions aren't motivated by faith and are not fruits of righteousness. Like a shepherd, God knows what to look for. He can see the heart and can tell if actions are fruit of righteousness or just faking it.

Being Receptive to Christ

What makes us righteous, hence making us sheep, is being receptive to Christ. When we receive His **WORD**, He makes us righteous; He makes us sheep. Receive Christ in **WORD** and **SACRAMENT**. **BE READY: BE SHEEP**.

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
