

## The Parables of Jesus

- The Separation of the Sheep from the Goats

-Matthew 25:31-46

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. It was the last of all of Jesus' parables. It was the last parable He taught as He was teaching the disciples the importance of being a true believer and a true disciple of His.

Jesus was alone with His disciples on the Mount of Olives as this was just prior to the Last Supper and His Passion. He was responding to their query concerning the end times. He was speaking and teaching them concerning their questions of the end times but He really wanted to teach them what they and the other disciples should be doing until He returns. The problem for the disciples was that they really didn't get the fact that Jesus would actually die and actually be "leaving" them.

In this last real time of teaching to His disciples, Jesus was teaching them and telling them that they were not only to be watchful of His return but they are to be "occupying" and doing the works of the Kingdom. By "works" He did not just mean healing, and other signs and wonders. What He really meant was that they were truly to become His ambassadors in their character and lifestyle of love, grace and mercy. These were the "works" that Jesus was more concerned about. These would be the true "fruit" which would expose and reveal who is a true disciple of His and who is not.

We must be mindful, that even though Jesus was teaching them these parables, He was teaching them and reminding them that He would be leaving them and ultimately what their "mission" in life would ultimately and actually be. Their mission, as well as all true believers would be to spread the Good News concerning Jesus and being "born again" to the entire world.

These last three parables that Jesus was speaking to them were truly teaching His disciples what they should be doing until His return. These last parables, as we know, were not just for these disciples but they were all of those followers and believers of Jesus to live by, until He actually does return. Jesus concludes this time of teaching with this Parable of "The Separation of the Sheep from the Goats."

*Matthew 25:31-46 - "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."*

So what was Jesus saying and teaching the disciples through this last parable? As with the previous two parables, Jesus was expressing more than the events of the end times. In these last three parables Jesus is putting His whole time that He has been with these twelve disciples (these past 3½ years) into perspective. Jesus was revealing to them what the result would be for those that believe in Him as their Messiah, their Lord and Savior.

Jesus was expressing that the "Kingdom of God" He was bringing to this earth and now would be entrusting to these twelve disciples until He returns, is all about living a "Christ-like" lifestyle and expressing the character and nature of God to anyone and everyone that they would come in contact with. His entire ministry on this earth was based on that premise. It was to reveal to the Jewish people what the true intent of the Law was meant to express.

The Law was to be their "schoolmaster" to teach them how a people of Yahweh, God were to live their lifestyle. It was to be a lifestyle that expressed the character of their God. They (the Jewish people) were to express His character of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, kindness, peace, faithfulness and self control to every nation, tribe and tongue. If they would live and express this lifestyle, they would then experience all the blessings and goodness of God.

The result was to be that they in turn would be His representatives on this earth so that He would reveal Himself as the One and only true God to the remainder of the people on this earth (the Gentiles). Unfortunately, the Jewish people failed in this. They failed because of the sinful nature that was passed on to all man through the fall of Adam and Eve. They failed as they rebelled, walked in disobedience and became "stiff-necked" to the ways of their God.

Ultimately, the Law would then show them (the Jewish people) their sinful weaknesses. It would then point to a Messiah who would be sent to not just free them from the bondage of mortal foes, but free them from the bondage of the real enemy - the devil and all his forces of darkness. This Messiah would not just give them the land of Israel back but He would also destroy the works of darkness that was throughout the earth and bring them a way to receive eternal life. Through Messiah, a restored relationship with Yahweh, God would be made available to them to live by and experience.

This was the mission of Jesus. This was the purpose for these last 3 ½ years on this earth. Now as He was approaching the culminating events that would set this ultimate freedom into motion, He was telling His disciples what it really was all about. Remember, they were still very much under the thinking that Jesus was not really going to die but maybe He would be going "away for a while" and they would be ruling in His stead.

Their thinking was still not correct. Jesus knew this. However, He still continued to express what He really came to do and the purpose of why He was doing it. It was to allow them (His disciples, both at that time and all that would follow) to be free from the bondage of sin through the shedding of His blood. This would then "lead the way" for the Holy Spirit to enter their lives and thereby, in the power and ability of the Holy Spirit, be able to live the Christ-like lifestyle expressed throughout the Word of God and manifested and role-modeled by Jesus, Himself.

This last parable brings a concluding thought to everything - it concludes what will take place just prior to the "closing of Heaven's gates" as expressed through the Feast of Yom Kippur as referred to in the two previous parables. We must remember that Yom Kippur points to the "Day of Judgment." Jesus in this parable gives His disciples a little glimpse into the events of "that Day of Judgment."

We see this expressed further in the Apostle John's vision of "that Day" in Revelation 20:11 - *"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."*

This of the "Sheep and the Goats" is pretty much straight forward. Sheep always represent the true people of God's "Household of Faith." Goats always refer to those who would seek to be a part of the sheepfold but inwardly were rebellious, stubborn and stiff-necked toward God.

In the context of the "good deeds" which expressed the "fruits" of a true repentant heart and lifestyle, it is symbolically expressed during the "10 Days of Awe," as we discussed that took place between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. We can see in this parable a very close comparison.

These "10 Days of Awe" point to the days of the disciples of Jesus expressing and living out the lifestyle of Christ. It is important to make mention that **Jesus never tells us that the "good works" mentioned in this parable are the cause of a person's salvation.** The thought that He was expressing was that **these actions and other similar actions would be the causative affect of salvation** within a person's heart and then manifested in their lifestyle.

As mentioned previously, those that profess to be disciples of Jesus are to be like Him through their lifestyle. We see the writers of the New Testament reaffirm this truth as seen Romans 8:29; 2Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 2:6-7 and 1John 4:17. The "good works" in a Christian's life are the direct outpouring and manifestation of the true "born again" experience, as well as the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit in the individual's life. They will reveal and express the true "attitude of heart" of the one who is a true disciple of Jesus.

As this parable reveals, there will be those who are "goats." These are those that rejected Jesus and the lifestyle of Christ. There will be those, as we discussed in the parable of the guest with the wrong Wedding Garment that will try to "sneak" their way into the Kingdom based on their own terms and by their own self-righteousness. We see and Jesus taught many times, that the "goats" like to hang out with the sheep. However, just because they hang out with the sheep does not make them sheep. Hmmmm.....

Jesus makes it very clear. It is the "fruits" of a true repentant heart, one who became truly "poor in spirit" and recognized their woefully sinful state who cried out for mercy and whose heart was truly changed and then manifested by "doing the works of the Kingdom." The "true "works of the Kingdom" in a disciple's life is the lifestyle characteristics that were role-modeled by Jesus.

The fact is that God knows, before this time of judgment, those who are true disciples of Jesus and who are the "Children of the Household of Faith." Their names are found written in the Lamb's "Book of Life." We see this Revelation 20:15 as it states, *"...And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."*

In Matthew 25:13, Jesus states it very clearly, *"...and they were judged every man according to their works."* Why? - Because it is the "lifestyle" and character of a person that truly reflects and reveals, when "push comes to shove," what the inner attitude of the heart of that person truly is.

Everything will be exposed at that time. All hearts will be revealed. The true disciples of Jesus will be revealed. For the "sheep," those who have been faithful, ready, prepared, watchful and true disciples of Jesus we see that, *"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.."* (Matthew 25:34)

For the "goat," the pretender, the hypocrite, the covetous, the self-righteous and those who reject Jesus for who He is as the Lord, Savior, Messiah and Son of God - *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."* (Matthew 25:45)

In the last parable, Jesus is very clear and truly reveals what His ministry on this earth and what the Father's heart was from the very beginning as found in the Garden. God's heart was and is always to restore the relationship between Himself and man. However, throughout the scriptures God makes something very clear. It is a choice that each individual needs to make. They either choose life or death – eternity in heaven with Him or eternity in hell and ultimately, the Lake of Fire.

As we conclude these parables that Jesus told and taught, we see that we can hear Jesus' words very clearly as He always stated that, *"Those who have ears to hear let them hear."* Jesus spoke in parables for this very reason. The parables are very clear and understandable to those who truly have a heartfelt desire to know Him and to know His truth. The true believer should desire to always understand and allow His truth to be revealed to them. We must always remember the words that Jesus spoke to us concerning this for as He stated, *"Ye will know the truth and the truth shall make you free."*