

# PARABLE 2

## SHEEP AND GOATS

## MATTHEW 25:31 TO 46

This week we are looking at another parable Jesus told

We used to say parables were 'an earthly story with a heavenly meaning'. Some have tried to over-interpret parables and give meanings to different facets of Jesus' narrative. Jesus normally wanted to make one important point and we should try to stick with that idea. We should leave the parable having understood an important idea Jesus wanted to get across.

You can often get the main point from what he is responding to.

e.g. A man said who is my neighbour?

There was a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho .....

### Main point

Jesus often talked about himself as the Good Shepherd and his followers as sheep. Sheep are known to be defenceless and reliant upon a shepherd for care, protection and direction.

Is that how you see your relationship with Jesus?

Can a modern assertive world cope with dependency on another person?

In the parable, the King separates the sheep from the goats. They are known to be headstrong, self-willed, self-reliant and independent

Serious question – have you ever behaved like a goat in your relationship with Jesus?

How often do you think you know best and stop listening to God?

This contrast is very stark and helps us to understand how Jesus wants his followers to behave

### What they receive

The sheep (devoted followers of Jesus) get to join his Kingdom - that's eternal life FOREVER

The King lists all the things that King Jesus thinks are great

They fed people – could we give some food to basics bank

Clothed people – do some refugees need some of our spare clothes

Visited people in prison – CCW does that

Maybe other acts of kindness you may know of in the group.

We can never do enough acts of kindness but are there things we could do that we are not doing?

Could you do something this week – this Christmas?

Jesus says you may have thought you were just doing it for the person in need but you were actually doing it for me. Jesus loves to see his followers doing things that help others.

How does this work out – when you do next doors shopping or mow their lawn do you really think you are doing it for the Lord Jesus?

Does this change your motivation either up or down?

**BE CAREFUL NOT TO SAY** that doing kind things makes you a Christian. It's the other way round **BECAUSE** you are a follower of Jesus you do good things and Jesus is delighted

Do we ever fall into the trap of thinking that acts of service earn us brownie points with God?

**The tricky bit**

What happens to the goats? – that is people who show no evidence of being one of Jesus followers. The people 'on the left' of Jesus DID NOTHING that looked like they were Jesus' followers. Those people challenge Jesus and say – 'When did we see you in need?'

Jesus says to them that they weren't even looking for opportunities. They were so absorbed in themselves. Jesus says such people cannot be my followers. We've all made mistakes in this area. We could have helped someone but we failed – like A NEIGHBOUR who needs a chat or a work colleague who is struggling. But here Jesus is talking about people who persistently and deliberately ignore Jesus and his words

*Is Jesus condemnation of 'the goats' too harsh?*

*Is the 'eternal punishment' of verse 46 a failure to give people a second chance?*

### **The danger of Salvation by works**

It is worth reminding people that becoming a follower of Jesus is ABOUT FAITH

*'All who did receive him, to those who BELIEVED in HIS NAME, he gave the right to become children of God' John 1:12*

But once you are a follower, behave like one. Look for places to help.

### **FOUR QUICK LESSONS**

#### **1. The sheep didn't know what they did**

They were surprised by what Jesus said

They weren't hoping to be noticed or to curry favour from the King.

They were doing good because it was their nature to care for others.

*Pray that God will give you an open heart to look for opportunities to serve the King*

#### **2. Little things matter a lot**

You may think how you helped someone didn't matter much - **but it did to them.**

There is no service too small for Jesus to remember and be pleased with you about.

*Ask God to help you to see that an act of service is never too small to bother about.*

#### **3. Don't leave good undone**

This is one of the sobering elements of this parable. Jesus notices the good things we do.

He also notices the things we neglect – the needy people we ignore. To become more like Jesus is not just about stopping doing bad things, it's about being positive and doing good things.

*Ask God to point you to people you can help – then start to build a relationship*

#### **4. We have to put in the effort**

All the things Jesus commends mean that we have to go out of our way to do them. You don't just happen to walk through a prison gate etc....

*Maybe pray that God leads you to someone you've already walked past and ignored.*

It is by God's grace we become his children (sheep)

Nothing we can do to can earn the privilege of calling God our father

But that doesn't mean what we do doesn't matter – IT DOES

Jesus' words explain this

*'Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognised by its fruit'. Matthew 12:33*

So our choices reveal which kingdom we belong to

**DON'T ACT THE GOAT – BE ONE OF THE SHEPHERD'S SHEEP**