

# “The Sheep and the Goats”

Matthew 25:31-46

Last week, we talked about the work that we do, the choices we make which are never pure or perfect. Everything that we do is done in sinful incompleteness. All of our works are filthy rags and they seem little because they are little. But it is the little things that are pleasing to the Lord. Today, we hear about Jesus on the Last Day dividing and sheep and the goats saying, “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink . . .” And the righteous answered, “When did we see you hungry and feed you . . .naked and clothe you?” And Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Our good works do not improve our standing with God or make us “more saved” – as if that were possible. However, even beyond feeding the hungry and visiting the sick, little things like patience, self-control, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness shown to others (even the undeserving); this pleases God. Your neighbor needs this from you. And Jesus says, “whatever you do to that neighbor of yours, you are doing to Me.”

Through our relationship with Christ, we are reminded that forgiveness being shown to someone undeserving of that forgiveness is something that all of us need. Thanks be to God that, on the Last Day, when Christ our Lord separates the sheep and the goats, we can be eternally grateful that our being counted among the sheep has nothing to do with us being deserving of being counted among the sheep. And I mean “**eternally**” grateful.

We are standing on the right-hand of Jesus only because Jesus put us there. You have been predestined from before God laid the foundations of the world. You have been called. The Shepherd seeks out His flock. You have been adopted into His family. You have been given His name, promised the inheritance of His kingdom, and given the sure and faithful witness of His Word that you will stand with all the saints in the glory of His presence. None of this was your doing.

When I get to that place, I would like to think that my overwhelming emotion will be tied to the thought that I have no idea why I am standing here on the right, when I deserve be over there on the left.

The vast majority who will end up (over there) on the left side of Christ right now have no idea why they will end up over there. They have no idea that they are dooming themselves to

destruction. Either they don't think there is anything beyond this life, or they are trying to figure out "how much can I get away with and still go to heaven?" – what is the minimum attention I can give to God and still sneak in the back door?

God would be fair and just if He condemned all of us to an eternity of Hell for committing even one sin. I talked about this on Monday when I was teaching at St. James. Thanks be to God that He does not deal with us in "fairness."

But rather, through faith in Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness which He has chosen to give through no cost of our own. He has forgiven us our wickedness and remembers our sins no more [Jer. 31:34]. We talked about that last week in our Sunday morning Bible class.

On the Last Day, Christ will only see the good things that we have done in our lives. The sins that we commit every day died with Him on the cross. They are gone. However, for those people who do not receive this good news and put their faith and trust in Christ's death at Calvary covering all of their sin, even their good deeds are tainted with the sin that consumes their heart. There is nothing they can do that is pleasing to God. "For I was hungry and you gave Me no food. I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink." My guess is that there are going to be quite a few on the "goat" side who have a history of buying drinks for other

people. But even their kindest actions will not be remembered as being done to Christ, because Christ was not their motivation. As Jesus said to the foolish virgins, He will say to them, “I do not know you.”

Christ tells us that on Judgment Day, those who are on the “sheep” side will be judged, but our sins will not be remembered. We are going to be credited with all of the acts of kindness and mercy that we have ever shown to another person – even though everything we do is done in sinful incompleteness. And even though there is no comparison between the acts of mercy we show to one another and the mercy that God has shown toward us, and even though our good deeds are only good because God is the one who has cleansed us of our sin and has given us the desire to do the good deeds in the first place, and even though the mercy we show to one another is only a reflection of the mercy that God has shown toward us, we will be credited as having done those good deeds to Christ Himself.

For one penny of kindness in Christ’s name shown to our neighbor, Jesus gives us an inheritance that all the gold in the world could not buy. As He says in Matthew chapter 10: “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward” [Mt. 10:42]. Amen.