KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material – *with Jill Gorven*

Matthew 25:31–46

Week of Sunday 29th September 2024

When the Son of Man Comes in All His Glory

Leader Preparation

This passage can be interpreted in several ways, and so this is a week where it will be necessary to set a very open and gracious environment where people feel comfortable exploring the complexities of God's Word.

The three most common views are described in pages 25–26 of the leader's notes. I have prepared this discussion guide with the third view as my starting point. The Content section will provide many cross references which will hopefully allow folk to have rich bible-based discussions. However, for the Delving Deeper section I have suggested fairly long and challenging passages that I feel are key to understanding the third view. Here you may want to focus on other Scriptures from the sermon, or just spend your time on the Content section which is more self-contained.

And remember that whatever the view we may hold, none of us wants to be a goat 😊

Group Time:

To get the conversation going read the first **five** paragraphs of the following article and ask your group to discuss this with "the good shepherd's" (John 10:14) separation of the sheep and goats in mind.

Link to the article Goats and Sheep by Bob Mahr (2020) https://coachmahr.com/goats-and-sheep/#:~:text=Sheep%20rely%20on%20a%20shepherd,goat%20doesn't%20follow%20anyone

I have also copy pasted the article at the end of this week's material.

Exploring the Passage

READ Matthew 25:31–46

Content

Verses 31–33 The separation into two groups

A common sentiment with this passage is the seeming harshness and finality of the judgment. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5–9 to assist with *a discussion around God's justice*.

"All the nations" in verse 32 is a term Matthew repeats in 24:14 and 28:19. And It also appears in Romans 1:5. After reading these various uses, *what do you understand the term "all the nations" to mean?*

In Matthew 13 Jesus tells many parables to describe the kingdom of heaven. Both the parable of the weeds and the parable of the net describe a separation into two groups "at the close of the age" (v 40 and 49). Read Matthew 13:40–43 to discuss *the similarities with today's passage. Also note that in each instance the difference between the two group is now evident, that is, it does not rely on judging what is unseen.*

Verse 34–40 The King's words to the sheep

Verse 34. *Take a couple of minutes to let your group just sit and imagine* themselves hearing Jesus in all his glory say to them, "Come… you are blessed… by my Father… inherit the kingdom… prepared for you… from the foundation of the world".

Verses 35–36. In these verses Jesus lists many ways he was afflicted and then helped. The following verses give exhortations to help God's people in the way Jesus says he was helped. Matthew 10:42; Romans 12:13; 2 Timothy 1:16; Hebrews 13:1–3; James 2:15–16.

Verses 37–39. Matthew 10:40–42 and Acts 9:5 help us understand how closely Jesus identifies himself with his disciples. And Matthew 12:50 helps us to understand who Jesus means when he says, "the least of these my brothers". [Of course this definition of brother as one who does the will of the Father does not nullify Jesus' exhortations to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. (Luke 6:27)]

Verses 41–46 The King's words to the goats

Verse 41. Here the goats are "cursed". Read Hebrews 6:7–8 to help *reflect on the blessed and the cursed in this week's passage*.

Verses 42–45. The ESV Study Bible notes that the goats' condemnation is because their lack of care for their brothers and sisters in Christ "is the same as if they failed to have any care for Jesus himself", and this makes the unrighteousness of their hearts evident. *Discuss whether this seems fair to you.*

Delving deeper

This section is an attempt to hold the truth of salvation through faith alone alongside the biblical claim that true faith, which necessarily includes love for God, will be able to be objectively seen in acts of love for God's family.

Read Ephesians 1:3–14. Note the similar words from Matthew 25:34: "blessed by my Father"; "from the foundation of the world"; "inheritance". *Discuss how this passage in Ephesians reminds us of how our inheritance of God's Kingdom is only possible through our belief in Christ and subsequent adoption as the Father's sons*.

Read 1 John 4:7–21, with special attention to verse 17 and 20–21. *Discuss how God's justice entails observable evidence*.

Closing off

Allow folk time for private reflection and prayer. And maybe close by holding hands and praying the Lord's prayer.

Goats and Sheep

ByBob Mahr / December 6, 2020



Included in Matthew's Gospel is Jesus' Judgement of Nations and reflection on goats and sheep [25:31–46]. Although often called a "parable," it is just a "similitude" or an imaginative comparison. This passage gets a lot of attention around the deeds of mercy for the least of our brothers being a criterion of judgment. I have used it myself in blogs **before**. However, this time I want to focus on the Goats and Sheep. I have never seen goats as the evil counterpart of sheep, so why are they accursed? I have reserved that personal judgement for cats (evil) and dogs (awesome). Although since my daughter brought her rescued kitten home from college, I have softened my stance somewhat.

In the time of Jesus, in the Middle East, sheep and goats were often indistinguishable from one another in a flock. Usually, only the shepherd who was familiar with his flock could tell them apart. To the outside eye, it would be difficult. In one of the earliest episodes of the Bible (Genesis 4:2), Abel became a keeper of a flock of sheep and goats together. In Hebrew life both animals were a source of milk, meat, and fabrics. It was important to early Hebrew pastoral economy to have a large flock of sheep and goats, it was a sign of wealth. Goats and sheep were equal in their commercial value.

Sheep appear aloof but are intelligent, quiet animals, obedient, and persistent. In the face of danger, the adult males will surround the females and the young. Sheep are admired for their loyalty and silent strength. Sheep follow the voice of their shepherd and trust they will be led to food, water, and safety. When they wander the shepherd will go and bring them back to the safety of the flock. Sheep rely on a shepherd to protect them from their environment.

Goats, however, are stubborn, destructive animals if left unattended. Male goats do not protect their mates. A goat doesn't follow anyone. A herd of goats goes where it wants, and the goatherd follows behind. Goats tend to be much more self-governing and impulsive than sheep, even unruly. Goats are naturally quarrelsome; they are aggressive and physical to establish dominance. Goatherds protect the environment from their goats.



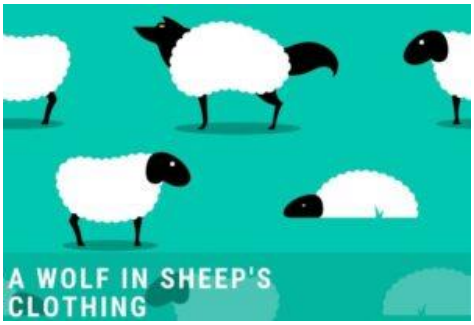
In the folklore of Ancient Greek culture, the goat symbolized the loose morals of the lesser gods, the symbol of a disobedient and an undisciplined lifestyle. People drew moral analogies from the habits of sheep and goats. The name "goat" became a derogatory term for a man shamed.

As noted, from a distance it is hard to distinguish within a herd which are goats, and which are sheep.



As a high school football coach, I would occasionally get the 'from a distance' question of why a certain kid was playing versus another, often based on the perceived differences in physical abilities. The best players allow themselves to be coached, they welcome it. They have the **humility** to be coached, much like the relationship of sheep and shepherd. The 'I know better' types feel their athleticism is all they need. They do their own thing, often to the detriment of others and the team.

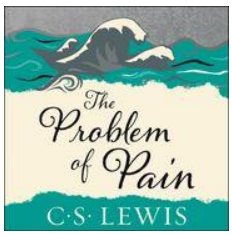
In coaching, I used the comparison of being on the team versus being a teammate. For this blog I will adapt it to fit. Being in a flock benefits personal ambitions; being a flockmate benefits the ambitions of the flock. Being in a flock is personal; being a flockmate is communal. People in a flock are energized by emotions; flockmates are energized out of commitment for one another. People in a flock have a common interest; flockmates have a common mission.



Surprisingly, as well as disappointingly, I see this similitude in society today. Those, who from a distance and at a glance are part of the community – civic minded and Christian – are behaving like goats, aggressive and quarrelsome. Earlier in Matthew's Gospel (7:15) he warns of false prophets (wolves) who come in sheep's clothing. But to me a goat who flocks with sheep is scarier. The wolves are intentionally practicing deception, they know they are bogus and misleading with the intent to destroy the flock. Goats, on the other hand, see nothing wrong with their behavior and like all the benefits of the flock while being subversive.

There is nothing wrong with independence and self-reliance. In a previous blog, ***Don't Be a Processionary Caterpillar***, I discuss not blindly following the group. We are in control of our choices and direction. Choices and directions set with **integrity** and no gap between intent and behavior. No one should be surprised by our decisions and path. We cannot keep company, in the same flock, with anyone who's not going where we aspire to go.

The words '**discipline**' and 'disciple' share the same root word, 'discipulus', which is Latin for 'pupil'. The concept is that as disciples we surrender ourselves, like a sheep to its shepherd or an athlete to a coach. Our surrender is given to God and His wisdom. We surrender ourselves with love in our hearts, into our Shepherd's hands without reserve and with boundless trust.



In "The Problem of Pain", C. S. Lewis described the fall of Adam and Eve as their desire to be on their own and to take care for their own future, and to call their souls their own (sounds like a goat). God is the shepherd of sheep not goats, with many biblical references to this fact. From Psalm 95:7, "For he is our God, we are the people he shepherds, the sheep in his hands. Oh, that today you would hear his voice."



Are we allowing ourselves to be sensitive to the pull of God's Spirit, and following the path of our Shepherd? Or are we headstrong, going our own way, and pulling back against God's Spirit? Does God see a gentle and communal spirit, a trust? Or does He see a spirit of defiance, self-will, and independence from His guidance? Do we have the humility to be shepherded?