



“Making God’s Purpose Your Passion” **Sheep and Goats—Matthew 25:31-46**

Getting Started . . .

Do you ever go through your cell phone, Facebook, or address book and get rid of friends? How do you decide who to keep and who to get rid of?

For Discussion . . .

- 1) To whom is this passage addressed?
- 2) What does this passage say about Jesus?
- 3) What does this passage teach us in regards to what Jesus thinks His people ought to look like?
- 4) What’s the relationship between the salvation granted in verse 34, and the acts listed in verses 35 and 36? Does this passage teach ‘works righteousness’; that one can earn salvation through deeds?

(James 2:14-19; Ephesians 2:8-9)

- 5) Can you remember a time when you or someone else took care of “the least of these?” How about a time you ignored them?
- 6) Who are “the least of these brothers of mine” in your life? How could you serve them?
- 7) How can we do a better job of noticing and meeting the needs around us?

Passage Summary . . .

“To Tell the Truth” was an old TV game show where a panel of celebrities would try to identify a famed contestant from three possible choices by asking them questions. Two of the choices could lie, but the real person was obliged “to tell the truth.” After several rounds of questions, the panelists would cast their votes, and the TV host would say, “Would the real [person’s name] please stand up?”

In *The Sheep and the Goats* the question is: “Will the real *Christian* please stand up?”

In Jesus’ day goats were not thought of negatively. This is what jolts the reader! *Both* sheep and goats were highly valued in ancient Israel. And, from a distance they were indistinguishable. Yet Jesus separated them in spite of their “superficial similarity.” Jesus asserts that His disciples cannot be identified based on race or religious rituals. You can’t always tell on Sunday morning who the Christians and non-Christians are. The Christians are

those who put God's love in action by showing how far God's love is willing to go.

This parable is not about earning your way to heaven by doing good works. That's not the point. The point is genuine faith. Jesus wants a life-changing community of authentic believers.

The judgment evidenced in this narrative does not ask if a person has accumulated x number of merciful acts but asks, "What kind of person are you?" Identity is always the issue. Are you a person characterized by the love and mercy evidenced in Jesus' kingdom—which is what faith is all about, or are you one characterized by no concern for those in need? Salvation requires such acts. The point is that a person cannot claim the identity without evidencing it in acts of mercy. Sins of omission are judged as harshly as overtly sinful acts. (Snodgrass 2008, 559)

What does Jesus want from me *right now* in view of what He will one day do to purge this world of evil? Who in my life—right now—needs a cup of cold water?

Notes:

Prayer . . .

Spend some time praying that God would open your eyes to the needs of others around you and soften your hearts in compassion for them. Ask Him to help you go beyond simply feeling sorry for them and to move into action.