

Sheep or Goat

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[0 : 0 0] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana.! As always, you can learn more about us at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

And for those of you who are regular listeners to this program, thank you for being so diligent to get into the Word of God. I just want to invite you this Easter season to come and check out the church. We are at 425 North Broadway Street in Greensburg, Indiana. And we have an 8 o'clock service, a 930 and an 11. We would love to meet you and see you as a part of the body of Christ.

But I want to tell you a story this morning about a fourth grade little girl named Lydia who went to school on a Tuesday after a long holiday weekend. Her teacher was asking each kid to share their adventure, big or small, whatever they got to do.

And when it got around to Lydia, she said that she went to church with her grandma and learned all about Jonah and the whale and even the importance of obedience to God's plans.

[1 : 1 0] Now, those of us who studied this story, we know that God prepared a special fish for this mission. And we don't know if it was a whale or not. But often for kids, it's just easier to call it a whale because that's the biggest fish in the ocean.

Well, Lydia was not aware that her teacher wasn't a believer and was actually pretty hostile to Christians. So she pushed back at this little girl with the childlike faith and she said, Well, Lydia, you know that's just a made-up story, right?

A whale could never swallow a human whole. And a human couldn't live in the belly of a fish for three days coming out perfectly fine. It is impossible. And that's when Lydia responded very calmly. She said, Well, I don't know how much the size of a whale's throat is and how God kept Jonah alive for three days. But I believe the Bible is true and my God can do it.

So, Miss Flannery, I'll just have to ask Jonah when I get to heaven, how did God do that? And that's when the snarky teacher fired back, Well, what if Jonah didn't make it to heaven?

[2 : 1 7] Well, Miss Flannery, I guess you're going to have to ask him then. Oh, snap, right? Or as I'm told that kids say today, sheesh! But that's an old preacher joke that maybe you've heard before.

But every time I hear it, I'm a little torn. Because in the words of a comedian I once heard, You gotta laugh, you can't be so serious. Take God seriously, but don't take yourself so seriously.

And we believe that here at FCC, as we love to laugh and yet study God's word and grow in our walk with him at the same time. But I also step back and I think of the truth of Scripture that teaches that when we die or Jesus comes back first, we will go to one of two very polar opposite places.

A place called heaven and a place or a place called hell. And while I know this can be an uncomfortable topic for some, I'd rather talk through this sensitive subject now and cause a tinge of awkwardness than see someone reject Jesus and discover that his words were in fact true.

So grab your Bibles. Turn with me about three quarters-ish the way through to the first New Testament book. That's Matthew. We're going to be in Matthew chapter 25 today.

[3 : 3 3] That last week of Jesus' life. So he's really trying to hammer in some messages here. And as you're getting there, welcome back to our series called Just Jesus.

This series is leading us to the crowning point of our faith. The heart of the church's message from Pentecost to present. The glorious resurrection of Jesus where the tomb was empty, death was defeated, and we discover life in the risen Christ.

So for five weeks now, we've been fleeing the chaos of our world to simply look at the lyrics of our Savior as he teaches the truth of the kingdom. And let's do that again this week as we talk about the differences between sheep and goats.

So, Matthew 25 should be there with me. Let's start here in these first few verses in verse 31. Jesus says, When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

[4 : 48] Now, if you are a note taker, please know you can always go to the YouVersion. That's Y-O-U version Bible app. Free download. You can get that. And if you go to the menu, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, you can see our outline that way.

But here's the first thing we want you to see. Jesus is the perfect judge full of power. The perfect judge who's also full of power.

Now, I'm not here to squabble over end times views and distract from Jesus' main point here. He teaches that there will come a day where he, the perfect judge full of power, will separate us out based on what we did with him.

And I love the story when the famous evangelist Billy Graham, he went on the Johnny Carson show. This was back in 1973. And at one point, Carson said, you know what, Billy?

I bet if Jesus ever came back to earth, we'd do him in again. We'd kill him again. And that's when this man of God kind of sat forward in his seat. You could see a twinkle in his eye because he loved to talk about Jesus.

[5 : 58] And he said, you know, in the Bible, it does say Jesus will come again. The first time he came in love as the Lamb of God, this time he will come in power as the Lion from the tribe of Judah, and no one will do him in.

And that's when Johnny Carson said, let's go to commercial break. See, to quote this powerful passage here from Philippians 2, starting in verse 9, the Apostle Paul, through the Holy Spirit, says, See, there will come a day where every heart, righteous or rebellious, all nations, that means every person, will come in humility before the power and authority and the majesty of the one who knit them together in their mother's womb.

Because Jesus, who has the sole authority to judge each of us, and he will separate us as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. So, as it often still is today in that region, sheep and goats were frequently herded together.

But sheep are kind of docile, gentle creatures, whereas goats, as you probably know, are unruly and rambunctious, easily causing chaos among the sheep.

Well, some of you know this well because you've handled both animals, and because sheep and goats don't feed or rest well together, the shepherd would often separate them for grazing, and for sleeping at night.

[7 : 46] That's the picture that Jesus is giving us. One that they understood because Jesus was the master of practicality. He didn't try to speak in these fancy theological religious words above their heads.

He painted everyday pictures and used them to describe the kingdom of God. He brought the word of God to life. Did you know that not all funerals are created equal?

And what I mean by that is I've done funerals like one I did in Rushville 15 years ago, where this 84-year-old lady had led Bible studies for years, sharing the truth about Christ.

She mentored so many women, and not only did she do that, but she truly practiced what she preached every single day, being covered by the blood of Jesus. Her funeral did not feel like a funeral.

It felt like a worship service where we truly celebrated a life now in eternal glory. But I've also done quite a few funerals where it appears from all biblical markers that this person was lost.

[8 : 52] They'd rejected or ignored Jesus. And while I am not God, and I do not try to play his part, I know that his word is true, and what he says about sheep and the goats.

And those are the funerals, I gotta tell you, that are really hard to do. Because at this point, their salvation of their loved one is already decided. So I focus on the hearts of those in attendance who still have breath in their lungs to make this most important choice to follow Jesus.

And Christ, the holy, majestic, sinless, righteous, loving, gracious, perfect judge who can do no wrong, he will separate the herd, putting the sheep on his right in a place of favor and blessing, but he'll also put the goats on his left in a place of disfavor and rejection.

And I want you to know something. Just because your grandpa was a faithful believer or a preacher of the word and a sheep does not mean that you automatically are a sheep as well. And just because your dad was the town drunk and an ornery goat doesn't mean that you can't be a sheep, that you're a goat. And that leads us to the next point that I want you to see here is that sheep bear the fruit of salvation.

[10:10] Sheep bear the fruit of their salvation. Now, as we continue in our passage in Matthew 25, and we're going to pick up here in verse 34, right where we left off, we're going to learn a valuable lesson here.

And we must read passages in context or it's just easy to misunderstand. This is one reason why we have so many cults today. And this might also be why so many people think that they can earn their salvation with their good works.

So let's start here in Matthew 25, verse 34. Stick with me. I want you to see a decent section of this story here. But here's what Jesus says.

Then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me.

[11:12] Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when do we see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? When do we see you a stranger and invite you in? Or needing clothes and clothe you?

When do we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The king will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

Now can you see why, if someone read this passage outside of the context of the book of Matthew, even the context of the whole New Testament and all of Scripture, how they could easily think that their good deeds are what saved them?

To be honest with you, this mindset permeates our culture in Southeast Indiana, especially the church culture. Until the age of 18, I 100% believed that my good deeds and how I treated others was my meal ticket to heaven.

If I fed the poor and the homeless, if I show hospitality to a stranger, if I clothe those in need, if I go visit the sick or the forgotten in jail, all wonderful things to do, by the way, and I thought, if I'm a quote-unquote good person, and do you know how many people who've surrendered their lives to Jesus still think their good deeds get them to heaven?

[12:35] You know what? I have those fleshly thoughts creep back in my head too. And it doesn't help that too many mainline denominations have simply become good work factories instead of gospel-proclaiming refuges that meet practical needs as well.

See, that's why when we read this passage, we look back over the book of Matthew and we see consistent teachings from Jesus that show that we're not saved by our good works, that our good works are simply dirty rags before Him.

Matthew chapter 19. You have the rich young ruler who comes before Jesus with this impressive religious and good works resume. And Jesus tells him it's not enough.

He wants all of him. For this guy, his idol was wealth and title. And so Jesus tells him to leave it behind and follow him. And the guy wouldn't do it.

Matthew chapter 20. The workers in the vineyard come at different times of the day and receive the same pay, the same reward, showing that someone can have poor deeds all their life.

[13:42] And if they come sincerely by faith to Christ at the end, they can still receive the same reward of eternal paradise. I even think of Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9.

And I always read this in the New International Version or even like the ESV or the New American. But I actually want to go to a translation that is a little easier to understand but still a great translation called The New Living.

And here's how it puts it. God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this. It is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

So once we understand that we are saved only by the grace of Jesus Christ because of what He did on the cross and by the empty tomb, once we get that through our thick skulls that don't always want to get that, and we come running with a heart of repentance by faith, then we will become that new creation in Christ getting baptized into Jesus, receiving that gift of the Holy Spirit.

That's God living inside of me. So you're not saved by your good deeds because, like I said a few minutes ago, Scripture calls them filthy rags before God, before His holiness.

[15:02] But like the parable of the sower, your salvation always produces fruit, a crop that yields 30, 60, or 100 times what was sown.

Let me put it this way. Because the grace of God has changed everything about our lives, because the chains of sin and shame and bitterness and unforgiveness have been ripped off, giving us a spiritual freedom like we've never known before.

Because you are a child of God walking in the power of the Holy Spirit every second of every day, you are different. And a redeemed you will overflow, spew out onto others.

What does David say in Psalm 23, 5? He says, You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. Now watch this.

My cup, what? Overflows. Picture that. Overflows. Or what about the Samaritan outcast that the religious culture told Jesus He shouldn't converse with at the community well?

[16:12] This woman who had been married five times and now lived with a man known for her ungodly lifestyle, promiscuous lifestyle. And what does Jesus do? He cuts through all the empty wells that she had drawn bitter water from her entire life in her search for hope.

And He says to her in John chapter 4, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And after knowing her story and seeing such a radical change, many of the townspeople came out to hear Jesus and came to know Him as Savior as well.

And I'll tell you, this was convicting stuff from my heart as I prepared this message. There are too many Christ followers, too many of us who've been redeemed and set free by the blood of Christ. And yet, we live our lives with empty cups. And do you know why we feel so empty? It's because we've taken back control of our lives and we aren't allowing the Holy Spirit to move in big ways.

[17:27] For many of us, we've stopped truly believing in His promises. We've halted our daily routine of memorizing and studying the Word so that we can know Him deeper. However, we've desensitized ourselves to think that this sin, you know, the one I struggle with, it's okay because at least I'm better than Betty May down the road, right?

We've deceived ourselves into thinking we're too busy to pray and serve when there simply needs to be a little bit of a priority adjustment. You know, what we've been saying for months now, Jesus first.

And going back to a couple weeks ago with the parable of the sower, when these hearts' soil are being tilled up, when this heart, when this soil is being tilled up and prepared, that's when a good crop will grow that yields more fruit than you ever thought possible.

And maybe today the church just needs to come and repent of our spiritual laziness and discover that we still have a God who can change our circumstances and who can move mountains.

Amen? Now, James chapter 2, starting in verse 15, puts it like this. Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

[18:43] If one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith, and I just want you to understand as you read James, you come to understand his definition of faith is a proclaimed faith.

Okay? A faith that someone proclaims that they have. So he says, in the same way, a proclaimed faith or faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, it's dead.

And that kind of faith, to be honest with you, the faith that James is saying is just proclaimed by some but not lived out, that kind of faith is no faith at all because, as Jesus says in Matthew 7, 20, you will know us by our fruit.

So think about this picture that Jesus has painted where he, the Savior of the world, was in need and as we're gathered around him, this beautiful time of submitting to his lordship, those of us who've realized our ugly sins towards God, our need for Jesus, enough to repent, we've turned away from that old lifestyle, by faith, we are following him for the rest of our days, he looks at us and

he says, for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me and we're like, Jesus, are you sure about that?

Because we don't remember seeing you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or need clothes or sick or in prison, when did all this happen? And he says, truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

[20 : 30] That's what we call a first century mic drop, okay? And our memories come flooding back of times where you loved others in the name of Christ.

See, sheep bear the fruit of salvation. No, we're not perfect. That's the reason why we're saved by his grace through our faith. In fact, we will battle against the world's ways and our flesh and even Satan and his tactics and his angels for as long as we live.

But by the power of our risen Lord and through the Holy Spirit living inside of us, we are growing more and more into his image, overcoming the enemy, storming the gates of hell, advancing the kingdom.

And if we belong to him, there's always going to be fruit. Could there be some rough seasons?

Absolutely. There could be. But there's going to be fruit when we belong to him.

And the church of Jesus Christ must do two things really well. We must stand on the truth of God's word while also doing that with a love and a compassion that the world around us has never seen.

[21 : 38] You know, there's a lot of people that do one or the other really well. But we are called to do both. So it's not our good deeds that make us sheep. It's the faith and trust that we've put in Jesus that always bears fruit that proves that we are sheep.

And when he separates us at his second coming, we will adore his presence for all eternity. And it will be better than our minds could even begin to understand. And as John Piper has said, the ultimate question is not who you are, but whose you are.

That's what determines if we'll be on his right or on his left. And then last, the part that should break our hearts, let's talk about how goats bear the fruit of destruction.

Goats bear the fruit of destruction. And I know this is not a fun subject to talk about, but we have to care enough about our biblical neighbors to speak truth and love.

Look at Matthew 25 again with me. Let's finish out our story here. Turn to verse 41. Verse 41. Then he, Jesus, will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

[22 : 57] For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.

They also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison and did not help you? And he will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.

And then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. Church, that's hard for me to read because like you, I have loved ones around me who want nothing to do with Jesus.

Could be pride. Could be bad church experience. Could be no one's going to tell me how to live my life and what to believe. Might be those who simply don't want to deal with this topic so we just kind of ignore Jesus and any conversations about him hoping that it all is going to work out in the end.

Scary proposition. Possibly, there's even those who sit in pews many Sundays who just admire Jesus from a distance but don't truly have a relationship with him that bears fruit.

[24 : 10] Could even be those who are preaching in our pulpits or leading our churches whose hearts live for the spotlight and the religious experience and to have this title put on their obituary someday a lot like the religious leaders that we see in the New Testament that Jesus flat out told.

I mean, these were the people leading the nation spiritually or they were supposed to be and Jesus flat out told them, you are lost. See, Jesus knows the motivations of our hearts and once again, we're not saved because we help those who are hungry or thirsty and need a shelter or clothing, sick or in prison.

Those are just examples of the kind of fruit that a sincere follower of Jesus should bear in their life because of a heart that's been transformed by him. It also exposes the fruit of those who reject

Jesus and I don't know if you've ever looked around at this country, probably the world, but especially this country at those making the greatest impact on the least of these. those often non-profits or churches or Christians, but you'll find it's almost always Christians rising to meet the needs in the name of Jesus Christ.

And as Charles Swindoll has said, hell is as real to those who die without Christ as heaven is to the child of God. So, let me encourage those who don't know the grace and the joy of walking with Jesus, let me encourage you to get into God's word, learn about your Messiah, ask questions, seek, and you will find the truth.

[25 : 46] You will discover a Savior who loved you so much that he took your place on the cross and then he rose from the grave to offer you life on this earth and life eternal.

You know, I'm even reminded of 2 Peter 3.9 that says the Lord is slow, or let me start over here, the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise.

As some understand slowness, instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, that's his heart, but everyone to come to repentance.

That just simply means to turn away from your sins and truly follow Jesus, not just flirt with him, not just say, fine grandma, I believe, but this true heart change that comes running to Jesus to be his child for the rest of your days.

So the question for each of us today is simply this, sheep or goat? And my prayer is that this church family, everyone listening to my voice through this radio station will be known for sincerely, I didn't say perfectly, but sincerely, genuinely, running after the heart of Jesus, showing that Christ-like love and compassion, showing that to everyone that we encounter.

[27 : 05] So, let's be sheep. And if you're listening to this today and you don't know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the amazing thing about his grace is that his arms are open wide right now for you to come and experience his amazing grace, to have your name written in the Lamb's book of life and to be called a sheep.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are so very grateful for your words of hope and your words of life you've spoken today. God, I understand that the message today may not be what everybody wants to hear.

It may cause some awkwardness, but Lord, I thank you that you love each of us enough that you share the truth that there is a heaven and a hell and what you do with Jesus on this earth is what matters.

And once we take that last breath or you come back first, there is no more chance to make that decision. So Father, I just pray, I pray with everything in my soul if there's anyone listening to my voice right now who doesn't know your amazing grace that you have lavished over them, the love that you continue to have for them.

Father, I just pray that today can be a day of salvation as they surrender everything to your lordship. Father, thank you for your words of hope and life. We pray in Jesus' precious name.

[28 : 34] Amen. Hey, I want to give you this invitation. I know today we talked a lot about salvation, so if you have questions about that, church questions, faith questions, want to talk about giving your life to Jesus, here's how you can reach out to us.

Once again, we are First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor here, but you can reach out by calling the church office at 812-663-8488.

That's 663-8488, or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you. I hope you have a fantastic week.