

JESUS AND HIS WORK OF JUDGMENT **(Matthew 25:31-46)**

His name was Keith. Keith was a singer/songwriter. He got an early start to his music career. At the age of 11, having already written 40 original songs, he signed a record deal with Decca Records. Success and fame eluded him, however, in his formative years.

Keith had a Jewish heritage, but he was raised in the Christian Science faith. As a young man, he embarked on a spiritual journey. In 1975 he renounced any and all ties with Christian Science, and became a Jewish believer in Jesus the Messiah. His wife, who was also Jewish joined him as a believer in Jesus.

Both Keith and his wife Melody were staff song writers for CBS Records. They lived in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Having compassion for the down and out, they began to take in homeless people. When their house was full, they bought the house next door to theirs to have more room. They went on to rent an additional five houses in their neighborhood. Eventually, to the consternation of their neighbors, they had 75 people living in their houses, many of whom were recovering drug addicts, prostitutes, bikers, and a number of single pregnant girls needing shelter and safety.

In 1979, after having recorded several Christian albums, the couple bought land and relocated to east Texas. By this time, Keith and Melody had a growing newsletter ministry, a growing contemporary, Christian, music ministry, and a growing family.

On a warm, July day in 1982, Keith, two of his three children, a church-planting couple and their six children, along with a pilot boarded a small plane to take an aerial tour over their 140 acres. Melody, who was pregnant, stayed behind with their infant daughter. The pilot did not realize the plane was dangerously overloaded. After liftoff, the plane could not gain altitude. It crashed into a grove of trees less than a mile from the airstrip. Tragically, all 12 on board perished.

Keith Green died at the age of 28. Just less than eight months after his death and two of their children, Melody gave birth to their fourth child, a girl.

Several albums of Keith Green's music were released posthumously. I never met Keith, but I listened to his music as a youth and young man.

Several of his songs contained hard-hitting, convicting lyrics. One song is entitled, "Asleep in the Light." Here is a portion of the lyrics:

Do you see, do you see
All the people sinking down
Don't you care, don't you care
Are you gonna let them drown

How can you be so numb
Not to care if they come
You close your eyes
And pretend the job's done

"Oh, bless me Lord, bless me Lord"
You know it's all I ever hear

No one aches, no one hurts
No one even sheds one tear

But He cries, He weeps, He bleeds
And He cares for your needs
And you just lay back
And keep soaking it in,
Oh, can't you see, it's such a sin?

Cause He brings people to your door,
And you turn them away
As you smile and say,
"God bless you, be at peace"
And all heaven just weeps
Cause Jesus came to your door
You've left him out on the streets

Open up, open up
And give yourself away
You see the need; you hear the cries
So how can you delay

God's calling and you're the one
But like Jonah you run
He's told you to speak
But you keep holding it in,
Oh can't you see, it's such a sin?

The world is sleeping in the dark
That the church just can't fight
Cause it's asleep in the light
How can you be so dead
When you've been so well fed
Jesus rose from the grave
And you, you can't even get out of bed

Oh, Jesus rose from the dead
Come on, get out of your bed

Another song, the longest song Keith Green ever recorded was based on the passage we will look at today. It was almost 8-minutes long and was simply titled, "The Sheep and the Goats." It came straight from Matthew 25:31-46.

This passage serves as the climax to what we know as the Olivet Discourse. This section (Matthew 24-25) began with Jesus warning about the destruction that was coming to the city of Jerusalem. He moved on to talk about His return. He ends the message by dealing with the judgment that is coming after His return.

This passage makes quite clear that Jesus is the Judge. You and I and everyone who has ever lived are the judged. Let's read our text and consider, "Jesus and His Work of Judgment."

I. IN HIS WORK OF JUDGMENT, JESUS PERFORMS A SEPARATION.

When Jesus came the first time, His glory was veiled. It was hidden from us. Peter, James, and John got a peek at the glorified Christ on what we call the Mount of Transfiguration. On that occasion and in that place, Jesus was transfigured before them, and the brightness of His glory was revealed in all of His radiance.

It is this radiant Jesus who will return one day. His proper place will not be a manger or a cross or even a church building. His proper place will be a glorious throne to match His glorious appearance.

Before Him, all the nations will be gathered. It is not as though Jesus is going to say, "Okay, up front I want the peoples of Afghanistan, Albania, and Algeria, and on the very back row I want Zambia and Zimbabwe. The word that we translate as *nations* does not mean *countries*. It refers to races or ethnic groupings. In other words, it just means all the peoples of the earth.

Jesus will proceed to separate them into just two groups. He refers to them as the sheep and the goats. This might seem a little strange to you. You might have expected the two groups to be the sheep and the wolves—the obviously good and those who are obviously bad.

Instead, it is the sheep and the goats. Now, goats aren't necessarily bad. Sure, they are stubborn, and they are self-willed, but they are also useful. You can get milk from goats. They can keep the grass mowed. You can also get meat.

Just after I graduated from college, I went on a mission trip to the island nation of Trinidad. While we were there, we were entertained in the home of a Trinidadian woman. She fed us curried goat. It tasted a whole lot like roast beef.

By the same token, sheep, no doubt, are very beneficial, but anybody who works with sheep will tell you that they are just plain stupid. I have a friend who likes to say that God was not paying us followers any compliments when He called us His sheep. Sheep, to put it nicely, are intellectually challenged; they are completely unable to defend themselves, and they are totally dependent upon their shepherd to provide their every need. That sounds a whole lot like us, to me.

So, what was Jesus' point in referring to the sheep and the goats rather than the sheep and the wolves? When sheep have been shorn, they look very similar to goats. They look a whole lot alike, but you can be sure, sheep have a completely different nature than do goats.

Elsewhere, Jesus told a parable about the wheat and the weeds (tares). They, too, looked very similar. This story is found in Matthew 13. In the story, a servant asks, "Do you want us to pull up all the weeds?" The master says, "No just leave them. At the harvest, I will tell the reapers to separate them. They will gather the weeds to be burned, and the wheat will be gathered into my barn."

Scripture teaches that in the church, there are believers, and there are unbelievers. They often look very much alike. At just a casual glance, you can't tell the two apart.

They dress alike. They talk much the same. They have mutual friends. They behave in much the same way. The difference is that they have completely different natures. The saved person has the Spirit of God living inside of him or her. The lost person does not. Therein lies the key, fundamental difference.

A separation is essential. It is necessary. You don't have to separate a sheep from a wolf. The difference between the two is as clear as between a lion and a bear. Likewise, there is a clear difference between a faithful follower of Jesus and a person who has no time for God and no interest in the things of God. A separation, however, is necessary between a saved church goer and a lost church goer. I am not qualified to make that distinction because I do not truly know what is in a person's heart. I may have some suspicions. I might be able to venture some educated guesses. Jesus, on the other hand, knows who are His and who are not; so, He is the one, the only one, who can and who will perform the separation.

Back in 2012, NFL referees went on strike. Team owners insisted that the season begin without the regular referees; so, the NFL hired replacement refs. Most of those they hired were college refs who had no experience refereeing professional football. This experiment only lasted three weeks. As you might expect, the replacement refs missed calls, took too long to make the right calls, called too many penalties, and in the process, they made coaches, players, and fans furious.

During the third week of the season, an angry Bill Belichick, coach of the New England Patriots, grabbed one of the replacement refs and was fined \$50 thousand by the league. Then, on a Monday Night Football game between the Green Bay Packers and Seattle Seahawks, the game was decided by a call on the last play of the game that was so clearly wrong the whole country was talking about it the next day. The media pointed out that because of the missed call, \$150 million changed hands in Las Vegas.

Confidence in the credibility of the game was lost. Players didn't know what to expect on the field and worried about injuries. Newspapers routinely used the word "outrage" to describe the reaction from millions of fans. ESPN declared, "Let's cut to the chase—the replacement officials have lost control of the game." Even an NPR (National Public Radio) blog chimed in: "It's the talk of the nation today as fans beg for the league and its regular officials to settle their differences so that the 'real' refs can come back."

Fans want the outcome of a game to be decided on the field by the play of the two teams not by the arbitrary calls of the officials. Fans want capable judges to do their job correctly because fairness matters.

Even though the trained and experienced officials are back, some calls are still controversial. Often, officials have to rely on video replay to change or uphold a call. Still yet, some calls are debatable, to say the least.

Both inside the church and outside, there are self-appointed judges who go about making calls, assigning blame, pointing fingers, throwing flags, and letting their voice be heard.

There is only one Person whose voice matters. There is only One Person who has the knowledge and fairness needed to make the right call, and He doesn't depend on video replay to make that right call. If there is any doubt in your mind as to who that Person is, let me be clear, His name is Jesus. He is the One who will separate the sheep from the goats and the goats from the sheep. He knows who belongs to Him and who does not.

The question you must answer is, “Do you know that you belong to Him?” If you are unsure, today is the day to get that settled.

II. IN HIS WORK OF JUDGMENT, JESUS CONDUCTS AN EVALUATION.

Jesus addresses the sheep first. He draws a word picture reminding the sheep of those many times they helped Him when He was in need. He talks about the time when:

- He was hungry, and His sheep fed Him.
- He was thirsty, and His sheep gave Him something to drink.
- He was a stranger, and His sheep welcomed Him.
- He was naked, and His sheep clothed Him.
- He was sick, and His sheep visited Him.
- He was in prison, and His sheep came to Him.

In the story Jesus tells, the sheep scratch their heads and say, “I don’t remember any of those times that You were in need or when we helped you.”

The first half of this past week, my family and I joined a couple of other families on a camping trip to Salt Plains State Park. We camped alongside the river and the spillway on the east side of the lake. I knew I would have less time to prepare my sermon for today; so, I brought my Bible, commentaries, and even a printed message on today’s passage from Haddon Robinson. Late on Tuesday morning, I gathered my books, and I walked over to a clearing that was called Wildwood Chapel. In that small clearing, there were twelve makeshift pews, six on each side, and a pulpit in the middle at the front. I sat on one of those pews made from railroad ties. I sat my commentaries beside me, and each time I finished reading one, I placed it on the pew in front of me. While I was there, I read the sermon from Haddon Robinson.

Let me share a portion of his message. He visualized what it might be like to stand before the King on Judgment Day. He said:

The King says to me, “Robinson, did you bring your date book?”

I say, “Well, yes, Lord. I know they said I couldn’t take anything with me, but I managed to get it through. I’ve got it right here.”

The King says, “Look up March 6, 1996.”

“Oh, yes, I remember that, Lord. That’s when *Newsweek* said I was one of the better communicators in the English-speaking world. I remember that.”

The King says, “Well, I never read the news magazines. You know how inaccurate they are . . .”

The King might say, “Do you remember after class on that day? You were headed for another appointment, and there was a young woman sitting at the back of the class. She just sat there when everyone left, and you stopped and talked to her. She said her father had died, and the month before her brother had died. And you sat and talked to her. Do you remember that?”

“I guess so, Lord.”

The King will say, “I remember it. When you stopped to talk to that young woman, you were talking to Me.

“Look up November 17, 1984.”

“Oh, yes, I remember that, Lord. That’s when I was the president of the Evangelical Theological Society. I remember [delivering] a paper on the relationship of hermeneutics to homiletics.”

The King will say, “Well, I never attended many of those meetings. I found them a little stuffy myself. I read the title of your paper, and I didn’t understand it. No, do you remember that morning your wife, Bonnie, told you about a couple at the seminary that was having a hard time financially. They didn’t know how they would make it through the month, and you took some money and put it in an envelope and dropped it in their box?”

“I don’t know if I remember that.”

And the King will say, “I remember it. When you gave to that young couple you gave to Me, and I’ve never forgotten it.”

You may experience something similar when you stand before Jesus.

According to this passage, the distinguishing characteristic of sheep is that they help people just because they need help. They do not do it with ulterior motives. They don’t do it with the understanding that they are actually ministering to Jesus. Just like Jesus, they have compassion on hurting people. In the end, they will be surprised that they were really helping and serving and visiting Jesus when they took the time to show compassion and concern to others.

At the judgment, the sheep will be commended by Jesus, but it will be a different story for the goats. At the judgment, the goats will be condemned by Jesus.

Pastor David Dykes commented, “In this parable the ‘goat people’ were revealed by their unconcern for those who were in need.” I would add, their eyes were blind to the hurting. Their ears were deaf to the crying. Their hearts were closed to those in need.

Earlier, I mentioned that Keith Green had a song called, “The Sheep and the Goats.” The last three lines of that long song read:

And my friends, the only difference between the sheep
and the goats,
According to this scripture,
Is what they did (pause), and didn’t (pause) do!!

Many people mistakenly think that Jesus and Paul were at odds over the matter of salvation. Paul taught that we are saved by faith and by faith alone, apart from works. Here, Jesus seems to be saying that the difference between those who are accepted into heaven and those who are consigned to hell is the former have works and the latter do not.

How do we solve this apparent contradiction? It has been said, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone.” Works are evidence that one has saving faith. James argued that faith without works is dead. A living faith is a faith that causes you to love and serve others.

What about you? Do you have a serving faith? If so, you have a living faith, and only living faith is what turns out to be saving faith.