

## The Division of the Sheep and Goats

March 11, 2020

**Text:** Matthew 25:31-46

### **Key Verses:**

*“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.”* Matthew 25:32-33

*“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.’”* Matthew 25:40

*“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.’”* Matthew 25:45

### **Basic outline** for 1-hour study

#### **Introduction:**

It is imperative that we do not make the mistake of disconnecting this parable from the previous portion of it – the parable of the talents. If you notice the distinct language that Jesus uses when he wraps up the parable of the 10 Virgins and begins the Parable of the Talents. “Therefore keep watch because you don’t know the hour. Again, it [the kingdom of heaven] is like. . .” It is apparent that he is ending one analogy and beginning another. There is no such break between the Talents and the Sheep and the Goats. It is as if the two are dependent upon one another for true understanding of Jesus’ point. It is discovering that point that is our true goal tonight.

**Teaching:** If the bags of gold (talents) are representative of actual money or abilities, then what are they? This question is the pivotal question if we want to end up as the 5 or 2 talent servant.

- ☐ **The Setup:** Jesus has setup an understandable analogy for the times they lived in with the parable of the Talents and he is about to turn it on its head with the story of the Sheep and the Goats. He is basically saying “this is how the kingdom of this world acts and, while it is similar, here is one big difference”. What is the one big difference? As you prepare to understand Jesus’ meaning it would be good to ask the question “Has Jesus told a story about a king and a servant concerning money that ended up with weeping and gnashing of teeth”? [See Matthew 18:21-35].
- ☐ **Why does Jesus use Sheep and Goats?** One of the most interesting things about Sheep and Goats is that Shepherds mix them in their flocks all the time. However, there behavior is radically different. The sheep follow their master directly, eat grass and constantly look to their shepherd for direction. In contrast the goats take whatever path they want, are distracted by everything, eat everything but the grass and have an internal desire to not do what the shepherd wants them to do, but in the end come around to their master.
- ☐ **What does the Master expect out of the sheep? And how does that relate to the earlier parable?** It is clear that Jesus expects us to show compassion and mercy to

those who are marginalized and in need. What often isn't connected is that this represents wealth in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the parable of the Talents the master was looking for the servants to reproduce gold by investment. The *twist* in the story is that what God looks at as wealth is different from what the world considers. Mercy, love, compassion from a heart that wants to follow Jesus is worth far more than the pavement of heaven.

- ☐ **Conclusion:** The clarity of the analogy when pressed together as one story told in one sitting is this. Each of the Servants were given wealth (according to their ability or capacity) the one that received five talents would have been the one (in the economy of heaven) that had received the most mercy, love and compassion from the Master. Jesus isn't just looking for us to be receptors of this grace, but he is looking for those who, like sheep, will follow him and invest it in those who are desperate for the same.

**Table Time:** How do we implement this teaching in our everyday lives?

- ☐ Is this a trade up from our earlier understanding of the parable of the talents?
- ☐ Who are the people that we should be showing love to? (according to Jesus' teaching)
- ☐ Do you see how the idea of taking care of the poor could still press us into a performance trap? How do we avoid that?
- ☐ When you consider how much you have been forgiven – and that forgiveness is the gold – what servant are you? (5,2 or 1 talent servant)

**Wrap Up:** Where have you been forgiven the most and how can that be the place you begin to express this level of compassion to others.