

The Sheep and the Goats

The following article is an excerpt from
“A Study of the Teachings of Jesus Christ”

Written by Joseph F. Harwood

Copyright 2021

<https://www.abookofbiblestudy.net/>

[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

Many of Jesus’ teachings illustrate differences between those who are His and those who are not, and as we have learned previously from several of these teachings, all genuine believers will bear fruit to the glory of God. In Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats given to us in Matthew 25:31-46, we can see some of the ways that this fruit will be manifested in our lives as God’s people. We can also see that such fruit is absent in the lives of unbelievers.

In this parable Jesus used the analogy of a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats in a flock to describe the way that He will ultimately separate those who are blessed by His Father from the wicked. Jesus characterized those who are blessed by God as His sheep, and He said that their inheritance and place in God’s kingdom has been prepared for them since the foundation of the world. Jesus’ teaching here may bring to mind Ephesians 1:4, where Paul taught that we as God’s people were chosen by Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him.

Continuing in this parable, Jesus taught about the good works that will be manifested in our lives as His blessed people. These works will demonstrate a love for our fellow believers and will include such things as giving of the resources that God has given to us so that others in the Body of Christ who are in need may be helped. Other examples of these works of love that Jesus mentioned are visiting brothers who are in prison or looking after other believers who may be sick or infirm in some way.

When we do good works like these, then we sacrifice something of ourselves for the benefit of other believers. As we do so, we will, even if only in some small measure, share in the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured for the sake of His people (Mark 10:45, Romans 8:17), and through this suffering and sacrifice we will bear fruit to the glory of God according to the principle that Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26.

As Jesus continued His teaching in this parable, He revealed that those who are His sheep will all give evidence of their genuine faith by works of love that will be manifested in their lives. He taught that just as we have shown love, mercy, and compassion to the least of His brethren, we have also done the same for Him. He then proclaimed that the destiny of all His sheep will be eternal life.

In contrast to the good works that will be manifested in the lives of His sheep, Jesus described the deeds of the wicked, whom He symbolized as goats. Works of love that are manifested in the lives of His sheep are absent from the lives of the wicked. Jesus said that just as they have refused to show love, mercy, and compassion toward the least of His brethren, they have also done the same to Him. Even though they may acknowledge Him as Lord and claim to be Christians (Matthew 25:44), by their works they demonstrate that the faith they claim to have is not genuine. Jesus proclaimed that their ultimate destiny will be eternal punishment and separation from God.

What we learn from Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats is that a genuine faith is going to manifest itself by actions; it is going to be evidenced by what one does – by his works. There is also another passage of Scripture that provides instruction for us along these same lines. This passage is in the letter of James, and perhaps James recalled Jesus' teaching on the sheep and the goats when he gave us this instruction. James taught that regardless of one's claim to have faith in Christ, if their claimed faith is not manifested by action taken that will meet the needs of a brother or sister in Christ who is lacking the necessities of life, when one has the means to meet the need, then their claimed faith is dead (James 2:14-17).

Jesus and James both taught the same truth: a genuine faith will always be accompanied by good works, which demonstrate love for other believers. As Jesus said elsewhere: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35). These good works are evidence that our faith is real.

In Matthew 7:15-23, we saw that Jesus gave another teaching that is consistent with His teaching in the parable of the sheep and the goats. In this passage Jesus symbolized genuine believers as good trees that bear good fruit. By contrast, He symbolized the wicked as bad trees that cannot bear good fruit. He concluded by saying that not everyone who calls Him Lord, or claims to be a Christian, will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father. Jesus taught that many of the wicked will acknowledge Him as Lord, and even claim to have done many miraculous deeds in His name, but in the end, He will tell them that He never knew them, and He will command them to depart from Him (Matthew 7:21-23).

Those however whose faith is proven to be genuine by the good works they do will one day hear the words of their Lord and Savior saying:

“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation 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; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”.... “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:34-36, 40).