

THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

- A. Introduction: We are discussing the fact that Jesus said there will be false christs and false prophets in the years leading up to His second coming, and their false gospels will deceive many. We are taking time to look at Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible (who He is, why He came, and what message He preached) so that we are equipped to recognize and reject these deceptions. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. We've made the point that a pseudo Christianity is currently under development. Although its core beliefs are contrary to biblical Christianity, much of what this religion professes is draped in Christian terms, and it sounds right to those who are unfamiliar with the Bible.
 - a. This new Christianity is hailed as more tolerant, more loving, more inclusive, and less judgmental than orthodox Christianity. It claims that all are welcomed by a loving God no matter what they believe or how they live—as long as they are sincere and trying to be a good person.
 - b. It is becoming increasingly popular in these so-called “Christian” circles to define the gospel as working to fix up society by endeavoring to end poverty, help the marginalized, and eradicate injustice in the world.
 1. There's nothing wrong with pursuing the above activities. However, the gospel is supernatural not social. Jesus didn't come to earth to make this world a better place through social change.
 - A. He came to die on the Cross and satisfy Divine justice in regard to our sin. Mark 10:45; I Tim 2:5-6; Titus 2:14; Heb 9:26; I John 4:9-10; etc.
 - B. Through His death and resurrection Jesus opened the open the way for all who put faith in Him and His sacrifice to be changed from sinners into holy righteous sons and daughters of God through inward transformation by the Holy Spirit (new birth).
 2. It is possible for an atheist to support the poor, the marginalized, and victims of social injustice without any internal change and with no thought of honoring God or living a holy life.
 - A. Note one of the characteristics of the days prior to Jesus' return: (People) will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly (II Tim 3:5, NLT).
 - B. A gospel that doesn't acknowledge man's sin or need for a Savior is not the true gospel. A gospel that emphasizes man's good over God's glory is not the true gospel.
 2. Because this false Christianity utilizes Bible verses that are taken out of context, misinterpreted, and misapplied, for the past few weeks, we've been considering the important of establishing context when interpreting and applying passages from the Bible.
 - a. There is a cultural and historical context to the Bible that must be taken into account in order to rightly interpret a verse. The Bible was written by real people to other real people about real issues. A passage can't mean something to us that it would not have meant to the original readers.
 - b. Last week we talked about the fact that Jesus personally taught Paul the gospel that he preached. He wrote 14 out of 21 epistles. In his epistles we see certain themes repeated over and over. His letters give us a clear understanding of what the gospel meant to the first followers of Jesus.
 1. Paul said the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. By salvation Paul meant salvation from sin. Jesus came to save sinners. Rom 1:16; I Tim 1:15
 2. Paul defined the gospel as the message that Jesus died on the Cross for our sin, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures. I Cor 1:17-18; I Cor 15:1-4
 3. Paul reported that when a person believes on Jesus they receive the gift of righteousness. We're saved from sin and its penalty, not by our works of righteousness, but by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit through the shed blood of Jesus. Rom 5:17; Titus 3:5
 4. Paul wrote that the Bible has been given to us to make us wise unto salvation and to instruct us in righteousness—both right standing with God and right living. II Tim 3:15-17
 - c. When you're familiar with God's plan for man and the purpose of the Bible, it helps you recognize

- verses that are taken out of context and misapplied. We must remember the big picture (what it's all about) turning sinners into sons so that God can have a family. The Bible reveals this plan.
3. The Bible makes it clear that when Jesus returns there will be a worldwide system in place—global government, economy, and religion. This system will be presided over by the ultimate false christ, a man known Antichrist (Rev 13:1-18; II Thess 2:3-10; etc.). These circumstances are setting up now.
 - a. As world conditions move in the direction foretold in the Bible, we're seeing government and religion come together as globalism advances. In our own country, political leaders increasingly cite the Bible to support their viewpoints as to what society should look like.
 - b. Disagreement with their policies has become more than holding a different opinion—it has been elevated to a moral failure if you are unwilling to back their “righteous” cause.
 1. For instance, in the debate over what should be done with undocumented aliens (or illegal immigrants depending on your political point of view), some invoke the Scriptures. They compare wanting to tighten our borders to refusing to give Mary and Joseph shelter when she was about to give birth to Jesus. This is an example of taking verses out of context.
 2. Joseph and Mary were not immigrants. Born and raised in Israel, they were travelling from one town to another. The Roman emperor Augustus Caesar ordered a census to order to enroll people for taxation. As per the custom of the day, Mary and Joseph left Nazareth and traveled to Bethlehem, the place of their tribal register, to be counted. The little town was crowded with hundreds of others who were there for the same purpose. Luke 2:1-7
 3. This issue is actually a demonstration of the growing push for globalism. This massive inflow of immigrants is occurring in many countries besides America. It is resulting in the watering down of cultural distinctions through the intermingling different people groups. This makes it easier to think in terms of a global community made up of one people, with no borders.
 4. For the rest of the lesson we're going to examine a passage that is being misused by the developing pseudo Christianity to support the idea that a social gospel is the true gospel. Matt 25:31-46
 - a. In this passage, Jesus related that at His return all nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them into two groups—the sheep on His right, the goats on His left. The sheep will go into His kingdom and the goats will go to everlasting fire.
 - b. The criteria for entrance into the Lord's kingdom is determined by the way the people gathered before Him treated the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison, making it seem as though our good works save us.
 1. This passage appears to be a contradiction to other Bible teachings. Numerous other verses say that righteousness is a gift from God received through faith in Christ and that our works are not the cause of righteousness, but rather the effect or result. True faith in Christ expresses itself in actions righteous actions. Rom 5:17; Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8-10; etc.
 2. Accurate understanding of the message of the sheep and goats is a good example of the importance of knowing a key principle in proper interpretation of Bible verses. If you have ten verses that say one thing and one verse that seems to contradict that idea, don't throw out the ten clear verses. Presume that you don't yet have full understanding of the one verse.
- B. But there's more to it. This is another example of how understanding the historical and cultural context helps us properly interpret Bible passages. Jesus' statement about the sheep and goats was made at the end of what theologians call His Olive Discourse. Matt 24-25
1. Two days before Jesus was arrested and subsequently crucified, His apostles asked Him what signs will indicate that His return and the end of this age are near. They all walked to the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, and Jesus gave them a lengthy answer.
 - a. Remember that Jesus' apostles were Old Covenant men who, based on the writings of the prophets,

were expecting the Messiah to establish the visible kingdom of God on earth.

1. Jesus' three year earth ministry was a time of transition as He gradually prepared them for the fact that He was going to establish a new relationship between God and man by dying on the Cross—the kingdom of God within the hearts of men through the new birth. Luke 17:20-21
 2. Based on the apostles' question we know that by this point Jesus had already told them that He was going to leave without establishing a visible kingdom, but that He would return at a later time to do so. Matt 24:3
- b. In His answer, Jesus listed signs that will signal His return is near and exhorted them to be faithful to Him and the work He would give them to do during His absence. As part of His exhortation, Jesus reminded them that, in connection with His return, there will be a day of reckoning.
1. Jesus knew that these men would face hardships, persecution, and death for their commitment to Him. He urged them to stay faithful even if the wicked seem to triumph because ultimately, justice will be done—rewards for faithful servants and removal of the wicked. Then He told them about the sheep and the goats.
 2. This isn't the only place where Jesus talked about separating people at the end of this age when He returns to set up the kingdom of God on earth.
 - A. He spoke of separating wheat from tares (Matt 13:24-30; 37-43) and the good catch from the bad (Matt 13:47-50). Notice, in each example both types of people are clearly defined.
 - B. The wheat are sons of God. Tares are sons of the wicked one. The good catch are just or righteous men. The bad catch is made up of wicked men.
 - C. Notice that in Matt 25 the sheep are referred to as blessed of the Father (v34) and righteous (v46) and the goats are called cursed or doomed (v41). In 1st century Israel sheep and goats were allowed to mingle together during the day, but at night they were separated. The apostles no doubt got Jesus' point: There is coming a time when the righteous and the wicked will be separated, so stay faithful to Me.
 3. This separation will take place so that every trace of wickedness and corruption can be removed out of His kingdom leaving only what is glorifying to God. Matt 13:41-43—The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers...Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (ESV).
2. Remember what we've covered in previous lessons. When Jesus talked about the sheep and goats, He had already spent over three years broadening His followers' understanding of righteousness by exposing the false righteousness practiced and preached by the Pharisees and scribes. Matt 5:20
- a. These religious leaders had correct outward actions, but they had wrong motives. They performed their acts of righteousness (such as giving alms, praying, and fasting) to be seen of and praised by men—not to please God the Father in Heaven. Matt 6:1-18
 - b. Jesus had to also broaden their understanding of how the righteous (sons of God) are to treat people. The Pharisees were kind to their brothers, but not to those who could do nothing for them in return.
 1. Although they kept the letter of the Law of Moses, they missed the spirit behind it and had great disdain for large portions of humanity.
 2. They viewed gentiles, sinners, and the lower classes of society as people to be avoided—not won to the light of Almighty God. Consider these examples.
 - A. Luke 7:39—A Pharisee displayed great contempt when a woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and anointed them with oil. Although it is commonly assumed that she was a notorious town prostitute, it doesn't say that in the text. She was most likely a Gentile or heathen who heard Jesus preach, acknowledged Him, and came to show her gratitude.
 - B. Luke 15:1-2—The Pharisees railed against Jesus because He received sinners and heathen (receiveth means to admit to hospitality, intercourse or credence).

- C. Luke 18:10-14—This Pharisee saw himself as superior to the tax collector and trusted in his own efforts or righteousness through works. This is the idea behind the word merciful in v13—O God, justify me the sinner upon the basis of an expiatory sacrifice which satisfies the demands of divine justice and makes possible the just bestowal of righteousness on the basis of justice satisfied (Wuest).
 - D. John 7:45-49—As controversy over Jesus grew, the Pharisees made this statement about their people: Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him? These ignorant crowds do, but what do they know about it? A curse on them anyway (NLT).
3. Jesus had to convey the idea that sons of God are kind to the unthankful and the evil just as God their Father in Heaven is (Matt 5:43-48) because, not only did the Pharisees not teach or model that kind of love, the Greco-Roman culture all around them was the complete opposite. (The examples below come from *How Christianity Changed the World* by Alvin J. Schmidt.)
 - a. The Roman practiced *liberalitas* which was giving with the expectation of receiving something in return. It was usually those who did not need help that received this type of giving. Romans regarded giving to those who could not contribute to Rome and strengthen the state as a weakness.
 - b. The Greek philosopher Plato said that a poor man (usually a slave) who could no longer work should be left to die. The Roman philosopher Plautus said that you do a beggar bad service by giving him food and drink. You lose what you give and prolong his miserable life.
 4. Although few people today realize it, giving to the less fortunate and helping the weak has been infused into our cultural consciousness because of the influence of Christianity. However, with the increased secularization of society, it has been completely disconnected from any connection to glorifying God.
 - a. We can't interpret the sheep and the goats from a 21st century mind set. People give money to the poor because they want to be good people. People give to get a tax break. We give money because we feel guilty about the suffering of others.
 - b. Jesus was introducing a revolutionary new concept: Give, not expecting anything in return. Give out of pure motives. Give to glorify your Father in Heaven. Give as an expression of faith in Him.
 - c. Remember another principle of proper Bible interpretation—a passage can't mean something to us that it would not have meant to the original hearers or readers. The apostles would never have taken Jesus' words about sheep and goats to mean that our good works will get us into His kingdom.
 1. The apostles knew they needed righteousness to get into the Lord's kingdom. But they didn't know yet that Jesus Himself will become their righteousness—even though there are hints of this fact in the Old Testament prophets. Ps 24:3-5; Jer 33:15-16
 2. He spent three years preparing them to receive righteousness through faith, not works. Once Jesus rose from the dead they learned that righteousness comes through faith in Christ and His sacrifice and that helping our fellow man out of a pure heart is an expression of that faith.
- C. The false Christianity now under development says that when we give to the poor, take in strangers, and visit the sick we're doing it to Jesus because God is in all of us and we're all God's children.
1. We've discussed in previous lessons that God is Father to and indwells only to those who put faith in Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ all humans are sons of the devil. John 8:44; I John 3:10; etc.
 - a. Matt 25:40—When we help the less fortunate in some way, we do it unto Jesus—not because He is in them—but because that is how we express our devotion to Him, by the way that we treat others (not just, but including, the less fortunate).
 - b. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (I John 4:10-11, ESV).
 2. In Jesus' example, the sheep are sons of God who do the works of their Father out of love for Him and love for their fellow man. Lots more next week!!