

Who are the Goats?

There are some very significant words in Matthew chapter 24 verse 1. There we read that 'Jesus went out, and departed from the temple'. They are significant because Jesus never entered the temple again. In fact the last thing he said in the temple to 'Jerusalem', 23:37, was 'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord', verses 38,39, 'And Jesus went out, and departed from' the spiritually desolate house.

From then on no word would be spoken in the temple by the Son of God. All sacrifices made thereafter would be in vain for the end of all sacrifices was at hand: God himself was about to sacrifice his Lamb without the gate – not in the temple. In fact, everything pertaining to the temple, to synagogues, and to all outward forms of religion was about to be brought to an end in the death, burial, resurrection, ascension and seating in glory of the Lord Jesus (cp. Heb. 10:1-14), and by the giving of the Spirit and the commencement of the building of the church on the day of Pentecost.

And this is as Jesus had taught: 'the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem [religious settings], worship the Father... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth', John 4:21-24.

And it has come to pass. Where is that house now? Gone. 'See ye not all these things...?' that is, the temple and everything pertaining to the temple? 'Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down', Matt. 24:2. And where is there a 'temple made with hands' today in which God is said to 'dwell'? It does not exist either: as has been well established by two new covenant witnesses: 'God dwelleth not in temples made with hands', Acts 7:48, 17:24. And how could he dwell in such places when he said that that dispensation is finished, and that 'Jesus went out, and departed from the temple'? Well, let the present day church- and chapel-goers seriously consider these things.

But then in Matthew 24:3,4 we read that after Jesus had departed from the greatest symbol of outward religion ever built he went and taught his own disciples 'privately'; which is what he has been doing ever since. That is, he teaches them in their hearts, by the Spirit, in their experience, away and apart from – despite – religious places, ceremonies, performances and services: being 'taught of God' by revelation, cp. Matt. 13:9-18. Thus it is to these disciples, and none other, that Jesus reveals great truths regarding the end of the world and the day of judgment. 'Take heed that no man deceive you', he said. Then let us take heed.

Now among the things that Jesus then taught his disciples was that on the day of judgment he, the judge of all the earth, would separate all humanity into just two groups, called here 'the sheep' and 'the goats', Matt. 25:31-33. The sheep would be placed on his right hand and the goats on his left. Presently after the judgment had been passed the sheep, also called 'the righteous', would go 'into life eternal', while the goats would 'go away into everlasting [again, eternal] punishment', verse 46.

In this passage it is the actions or non-action of the people which is addressed by the Saviour as the basis for judgment: the sheep had done, while the goats had not done certain things in relation to Christ himself, and, by implication, to his people the sheep. To both he says, 'I was an hungered... I was thirsty... I was a stranger... naked... sick... in prison...' with each having responded to his needs differently: the sheep had attended to them while the goats had not. This is the sole judgment in these verses.

But Jesus' teaching here has been much used and abused in the professing Christian church, being terribly misunderstood and therefore misrepresented. No doubt many have fashioned their whole Christian lives on following what they think it means in the hope of being found on the right hand on that day, but they are greatly deluded. What I mean is this. Jesus said to the sheep, 'I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat', and these words have been used to underpin all manner of work among the starving of this world: feeding the poor and hungry, running soup kitchens, giving to aid

charities, showing hospitality, etc., while the rest of what Jesus said he was, has been used likewise. So if we relieve the poor, the destitute, the homeless; if we visit the sick in hospital and the criminals in prison, then we think we are sheep, for 'ye gave me meat and drink... ye took me in... clothed me... visited me... came unto me.' Now all these are admirable things to do, and the world would be a worse place if many with Christian convictions – however misplaced – did not set up agencies and employ workers with a heart for the needy, to go some way in relieving the sorry state of their fellow mortals. But for all that, this is not what Jesus is speaking of here.

No, Jesus' words never have merely a carnal application, they are always 'spirit and life': fleshly interpretations of them being profitless, John 6:63. Yes, one could spend one's whole life tending to the needs of the less well off – and all in Jesus' name too, Matt. 7:21-23 – and yet still be revealed as a goat in the end. How so? For Jesus' words have a much more profound and spiritual meaning than these people allow, and is why there are going to be 'many' on the day of judgment who will plead what they have done 'as Christians' as the basis of all their hope for salvation, but who will be exposed by the Lord Jesus as having been 'workers of iniquity' all along. And this is a truth that the goats are ignorant of but still rage against, but which the sheep know and feel all too well.

For the truth is that Christ is speaking here of spiritual hunger and thirst; of the stranger upon the earth for Christ's sake; and of the spiritually naked, sick, and prisoners.

'I was an hungered...'

The beginning of the judgment regarding the condemnation of the goats is that Christ was hungered but they gave him no meat, verse 42. But who ever thought of Christ being hungry? and thirsty... a stranger, naked, sick and in prison? 'When saw we thus?' the goats cry: the very thought is baffling to them, as it had been to the sheep earlier – but for more humble reasons. But how could Christ be all these things, and be them apparently in front of their eyes as well, without them ever seeing him? Because they had no understanding, appreciation or even love for the truth of Christ's intimate association and union with his sheep: inasmuch as he could say that 'I was an

hungered', when it is obvious that he was speaking about his sheep. As he says, 'Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of *these* [earlier he calls his sheep 'my brethren'], ye did it not unto *me*', verse 45. (Compare also Acts 9:1-4, where Saul was said to be 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter *against the disciples* of the Lord', when in fact Jesus said to him, 'Why persecutest thou *me*?')

No, the goats knew not Christ and they never fed him – his sheep. In fact the opposite was true. They decidedly starved the sheep. There was a little sheep wandering from church to chapel to fellowship to assembly, bleating, seeking food for his famished soul: spiritual food to fulfil the longing desire – *desperate need* – for even one morsel of living gospel truth to encourage him and sustain him in the way. But no. The goats couldn't and didn't feed him.

But Jesus had already shown this earlier when, entering Jerusalem, 'he hungered', and saw a fig tree by the way – a picture of Jerusalem after the flesh – goats – but found thereon no fruit: no 'meat'; so he spoke to it in his wrath, and vexed it in his sore displeasure, and it dried up from the roots and withered away.

Now listen, all you Christian play-actors, with your false gospels, fake ministries, traditions of men, and Sunday entertainments – 'praise and worship' as you like to call it: your religion is like that fig tree; for Christ himself, in one of his lowly sheep, has probably wandered into your fellowship – unbeknown to you – and has experienced the *intense pain* of not having had his aching hunger alleviated in your meetings; has perhaps complained about the ministry, contended against what you say you believe, made 'trouble', as you suppose, and has eventually left. And you've let him go: being pleased to see the back of him, if truth were told; but it was one of those least of Christ's brethren: a veritable stranger upon the earth – and in the churches – but you never fed him, and you never gave him drink, and you are about to receive your everlasting punishment for not doing so, except you repent.

And this goes for all those hirelings in the pulpits who flee the flock when they see the wolf coming: well, he is called an hireling because he careth not for the sheep, and a careless hireling is not going to feed

the sheep, is he? John 10:7-14. And so it is. How many preachers or pastors there are who are happy to enjoy 'fellowship' with those who will sit and listen to their preaching – quietly and unquestioningly, of course – until the hearer gets an inkling of truth received by revelation – something the hireling never receives – starts to question the ministry, disagree and depart, who never sincerely seek after that sheep to try all they can to win him back to the fold? There are many, and I know a sheep who can give you a list of at least a dozen such ministers.

But sheep need feeding, not forsaking! Wandering sheep need to be sought out and carried back to the fold; but hirelings will never do such things. Why? Because they are goats! and their churches and chapels are not part of the true fold. But it is *Christ* they are hurting: 'I was an hungered...' And so he says, 'Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto *me*.' Therefore this word INASMUCH cannot rightly be used to include just anything done to help 'a Christian', or the poor; nor, for that matter, to commend the financial supporters of a certain 'little magazine'.

The goats' food

Yes, I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat. But this is not to say that the goats themselves were not feeding. No. For while the sheep starved the goats were quite happy with their diet. It is a well known fact that goats, unlike sheep, will eat just about anything. And so it is in the profession of Christianity: truth or otherwise, goats will feed on anything. I've already mentioned false gospels, fake ministries, traditions of men, and Sunday entertainments: things that goats are quite happy to feast upon, even if there is a little truth mixed in to the fare from time to time – although the truth does tend to give them indigestion.

Consider goats' diet of free-will and an indefinite atonement: 'Christ died for all, if only all will believe it'; of works-based – progressive – sanctification; or of upholding the law before the children of God as a rule by which they are to live. Reformed 'in word only' ministries, although seasoned at times with stirring old Welsh hymn tunes, just can't sustain hungry sheep in the long run. And then what about those with no actual substance to their profession who have to

concentrate on the sign gifts: who think they can ‘pray the Spirit down’ to bless them with tongues, prophecies, words of knowledge, healings, signs and wonders: but these people are devoid of the doctrine of the gospel, and therefore of the Spirit, so the sheep can never feed among them.

But it seems to me that the staple diet of most goats today is what is termed ‘worship, praise and fellowship’, again usually based on an Arminian gospel – which is no gospel at all. How easy it all is, how tasty the food, how sweet. ‘All you have to do’ is come into God’s presence, rejoice in him, ‘enjoy’ him, smile nicely, give ‘the peace’ to your neighbour, sing heartily, or softly, feel a little moved, a little emotional, a little sentimental about ‘God’ and ‘Jesus’; enjoy the feast of fellowship, be loving, caring, sincere, and pray for your fellow worshippers; hear good ministry, nice thoughts, or challenging sermons to encourage you to be better, do better, or just to love God more, and a hearty meal can be had by all – by all the goats.

Furthermore, what nourishment music gives – indeed, music seems to have replaced preaching as one of your basic ‘five-a-day’ for spiritual wellbeing. The band, the worship group, those who exercise their ‘calling’ by leading the singing in the services: these are all essential ingredients of the goats’ diet, because it is all of the flesh, and any poor sheep awakened to the fact that there is not one spiritual calorie to be ingested from the whole rotten lot of these putrefying, maggot-infested platters, will soon flee from it all, with his hunger pains not only not assuaged, but heightened.

And yet there is another type of menu that goats like to feed from, and that is ‘the tradition of the elders’. The ‘meat-and-two-veg’ of these is to ‘keep to the old paths’, keep things just as they have always been: retain the vision of the founding fathers. But what a deathly, unappetising, unsalted meal these serve up. Yes, you might come across a little bit of substance from time to time, for ‘the fathers’ may very well have had the truth, but the children – the great-great-grandchildren – only have at best a semblance of gospel truth, wrapped up in present-day unregeneracy and therefore spiritual barrenness. So mostly what you are served among these is dry old bones: vain repetitions of the fathers’ experience and, perhaps,

revelation, rarely shared by the sons. But what succulence – the living truth of the gospel preached in the power of the Spirit – can the sheep ever draw from these? For all their apparent substance – gained mostly from old books, commentaries or magazines, cp. Jer. 23:30 – there is just no taste to their food, no real savour: it all adds up to ‘death in the pot’, and so there is nothing at length to sustain the poor hungry sheep.

No. Christ and his people will never feed satisfactorily under these various pretensions of ‘living bread’. And if the reader can and does feed under any of them then you betray too much of a liking for goat’s food and are spiritually very sickly indeed. I speak from bitter experience.

So who are the goats? They are those who don’t feed the sheep. Yes, they are your pleasant but worldly neighbours, and your friendly and perhaps caring work colleagues, none of which know Christ, have any saving knowledge of his gospel, and therefore cannot give you any spiritual meat; but they are, more painfully, those who go to the local church or chapel, who, although they may profess the name of Christ, have no spiritual conversation (every word they speak is ‘idle’ – unprofitable, Matt. 12:36), having never desired or fed upon the sheep’s food, and consequently show no real concern for the state of your soul, having no understanding of what it is like to be bereft of true spiritual nourishment. All are goats, and to every one the Lord Jesus will say on the day of judgment, ‘I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat... Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’, Matt. 25:41,42.

Christ and his sheep

But let us turn now and meditate on the wonderful truth revealed by the Lord Jesus in these verses of the union between himself and his people, the sheep. What a Saviour! They are the hungry ones, but it is he who declares on that day that it was he himself that was hungry: they were he. He is not ashamed to call them his brethren, Heb. 2:11,12.

But this is only typical of the mind of the Redeemer in relation to his people. As far as God is concerned it was they who died upon the

cross: after all, it was their sin and their sins which were being judged, punished, and put away upon the tree. But they weren't there, their substitute was dying there in their place, *as them*: '...the good shepherd giveth his life *for* the sheep', John 10:11-18. Paul could say, 'I am crucified with Christ', but Paul wasn't handed over by Pilate, he was still Saul of Tarsus a legally blameless Pharisee when Jesus was hanging upon the cross. But Paul was there as far as the Father was concerned. Christ was made sin – was being made Paul's sin; Christ was bearing away sins – Paul's sins; and when he died, the Father looked down and saw Paul die, Paul buried, Paul rising from the dead, Paul ascending into heaven, Paul sitting down in heavenly places. But it was Christ who did it all *for* Paul, and for and as all his sheep. Substitution.

And now, in this new covenant dispensation, as Christ's sheep are found wandering the earth in search of food convenient for them, and living water to drink; as they are separated by the indwelling and teaching of the Spirit from all things worldly – becoming strangers and pilgrims – homeless – on the earth; as they desire constantly the doctrine of the gospel of Christ, wherein is revealed the righteousness of God – that one only righteousness which is sufficient to clothe them and cover their spiritual nakedness before the Father on that day; as they are sick of sin, of the world, and of the flesh; sick of temptation, oppression, and of hypocritical and empty religion; and when they feel as though they are in a prison-house in this body of death, and amidst all the trials and hardness of the narrow way: when they are all these things, then Christ appears on the day of judgment and says, No, it was *me* who was in that state; and turning to the goats on his left hand he will say, *And none of you once relieved me.* 'Depart from me...'

Surely this should send waves of fear through every one who professes the name of Christ. Surely we should all give diligence to make our calling and election sure, and examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. But, no, it won't much trouble the goats, and neither will they examine nor judge themselves, because surely, they reason, these things can't apply to *them*, after all, they have their testimony, their churches, their fellowships, and their forms of godliness; they have their love and care for one another: their

pastoral teams, their prayer meetings and visiting rotas to care for the poor and elderly among them; they have their societies, their causes, their support workers; they encourage one another and build one another up; they send money to missionaries, and to Bible Societies; they have their prayer calendars, and special prayer meetings where God really hears their prayers and sends amazing answers!

But what gospel are these missionaries and societies preaching to the 'poor darkened souls' abroad? Again, are the answers to prayer that 'a well has successfully been dug to supply clean water to a whole village' (with our easily proffered money) really what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 25? No, it wasn't. Then what of the answered prayers? What of the missionaries' 'calling'? What of the spiritual understanding of Jesus' doctrine in the meetings that support them? What of their spirituality at all? But, 'Lord, Lord, have we not done many wonderful works in thy name...? Did we not see thee athirst in Africa and give thee drink...?' No, they didn't.

And now, when these things are pointed out to them, and when the scriptures are faithfully expounded which show up their errors of interpretation, what do they do? Well, I'm not going to say what they will do. Who can tell, perhaps God will grant them repentance; perhaps they will rend their hearts and not the messenger; perhaps the Lord will open the eyes of the blind, and by a miracle of free, discriminating, regenerating grace, transform hitherto goat-like creatures into sheep, giving them for the first time in their lives an appetite for real spiritual food, and in so doing receive all the glory. Amen.