

Matthew 25:31-25:46

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE (MATT. 25:31-46)

Shortly after the Pope had apologized to the nation of Israel for the treatment of Jews by the Catholic Church over the years, Ehud Barak, the leader of Israel, sent back a message to the College of Cardinals. The proposal was for a friendly game of golf to be played between the two leaders or their representatives to show the friendship and ecumenical spirit shared by the Catholic and Jewish faith.

The Pope met with his College of Cardinals to discuss the proposal. "Your Holiness," said one of the Cardinals, "Mr. Barak wants to challenge you to a game of golf to show that you are old and unable to compete I am afraid that this would tarnish our image to the world." The Pope thought about this and as he had never held a golf club in his life asked, "Don't we have a Cardinal to represent me?" "None that plays golf very well," a Cardinal replied. "But," he added, "there is a man named Jack Nicklaus, an American golfer who is a devout Catholic. We can offer to make him a Cardinal, then ask him to play Mr. Barak as your personal representative. In addition to showing our spirit of co-operation, we'll also win the match." Everyone agreed it was a great idea. The call was made. Of course, Nicklaus was honored and agreed to play as a representative of the Pope.

The day after the match, Nicklaus reported to the Vatican to inform the Pope of the result. "I have some good news and some bad news, Your Holiness," said the golfer.

"Tell me the good news, Cardinal Nicklaus," said the Pope. "Well, Your Holiness, I don't like to brag, but even though I've played some pretty terrific rounds of golf in my life, this was the best I have ever played, by far. I must have been inspired from above. My drives were long and true, my irons were accurate and purposeful, and my putting was perfect. With all due respect, my play was truly miraculous." "How can there be bad news?" the Pope asked. Nicklaus sighed, "I lost to Rabbi Tiger Woods by three strokes."

Sheep and goats are often seen together in the same grounds. Farmers, ranchers, and herdsman usually allow them to graze and roam in the same field. Jesus did not say that observers cannot distinguish between a sheep and a goat, but that as long as they can remember, they have seen the animals together. It is pointless, redundant, work and money for the owners to place them in different fields. Sheep and goats are free to wander, mingle, and associate unless they are separated. They do not fight, envy or avoid one another.

Miss Jones, an elderly spinster, lived in a small Midwestern community. She had the distinction of being the oldest resident of the town. One day she died, and the editor of the local newspaper wanted to print a little caption commemorating Miss Jones' death. However, the more he thought about it, the more he became aware that while Miss Jones had never done anything terribly wrong, yet she had never actually done anything noteworthy.

While musing over this, the editor actually went down to have his morning coffee and met the owner of the tombstone establishment in the little community. The tombstone proprietor stated that he had been having the same problem. He wanted to put something on Miss Jones's tombstone besides her birthday and death date, but he couldn't think of anything of significance that she had ever done.

The editor decided to go back to his office and assign to the first reporter he came across the task of writing up a small article suitable for both the paper and the tombstone. Upon returning to the office, the only fellow around was the sports editor, so he gave him the assignment. He wrote:

"Here lies the bone of Nancy Jones,
For her life held no errors.
She lived an old maid.
She died an old maid.
No hits, no runs, no errors." (Hewett, James)

Sin, according to world religions, is doing what is wrong or bad. The Chinese argue, "I have not kill people or set fires. How have I sinned?" According to the Bible, sin is not merely doing what is wrong, but also failing to do what is right or good. Sin is not merely a bad deed committed but a right thing omitted. Theologically, the practice of wrongdoing is the sin of commission, and the failure to do right is the sin of omission. James 4:17 explains, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

Jesus met a ruler who asked Him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" The ruler responded, "All these I have kept since I was a boy," Jesus then said, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When he heard this, he became very sad, and did nothing (Luke 18:18-23).

Both the sheep and goats are people who have perfected the art of doing nothing. They won't hinder, hurt or harm anyone but they won't help others to survive or succeed either. They won't endanger people, but they won't enable, encourage or empower others either. They are worse than the minimalists, who do the barest minimum or exert the least effort. Both sheep and the goats say, "What can one do?" "There are too many needy people in the world," or "Why me? Why not others?"

At different times both the sheep and the goats, on the other hand, are proactive, positive, and practical. They were a balm to people's pain. Their motto is, "If I cannot help all, I will help one." Notice Jesus used the singular "stranger" (v 35). He did not ask a lot from caregivers, just to serve one.

An unlikely and bizarre story emerged from the screening of the movie "The Passion of the Christ." Dan Randall Leach II, 21, a southern Texas man from Rosenberg, Texas, confessed to the killing of his pregnant girlfriend, whose death had been tentatively ruled a suicide earlier. The pair had been dating for three to five months, and it appeared that Leach wanted to end the relationship.

Leach was promptly charged with first-degree murder. Law enforcement officers said the man confessed after seeing "The Passion of the Christ," saying the film helped persuade him to come forward. Fort Bend County, Texas, Sheriff's Lt. Jim Pokluda said in an interview: "It's a very strong movie. It would make a man think twice about any sin that he has committed." Pokluda said Leach confessed to strangling his girlfriend, 19-year-old Ashley Nicole Wilson, with a cord and then staging the death to make it appear she had committed suicide. The victim's mother found her daughter dead in her studio apartment in Richmond about 30 miles southwest of Houston.

Investigators said nearly two months after the body was found, Leach went to see "The Passion of the Christ," and on March 7, he went to church, announced that he needed to confess a crime and drove himself to the sheriff's office. (Los Angeles Times, March 26, 2004 "'Passion' Prompts Man to Confess.")

So what is the point. The point is that the key to being a sheep is believing in Jesus. People who are impacted by the truth of Christ's death enough to confess their sins, These type of people will be the sheep. Of course we can't really tell who is sincere.

But sincerity is not the key. Because Jesus is the way and the truth and the life and we can only come to the Father through him. You don't go to heaven because you are sincere. You go to heaven because you believe in Jesus.

The things we do like feeding the hungry, visiting those imprisoned, and clothing the naked, when they are done through faith in Christ they are commended by God. We don't keep track of them because in the end the sheep don't know what Jesus is talking about. From our perspective these acts are like filthy rags. But God chooses to uphold them and show their good quality.

We must be careful that we are not placing ourselves as judge over others. They may or may not be who they say they are.

One of the most outrageous impostor stories is that of pharmacist Gerald Barnes, who fooled patients and doctors and his five wives for 25 years posing as a doctor. Barnes had no medical diploma or medical license. He learned surgery by practicing on a chicken. When Barnes lost his pharmacist license in the 70's, he assumed the identity of a doctor with the exact same name.

Two years after the quack doctor got his first job, he was recruited by a more upscale clinic in Irvine, where a doctor investigated Barnes' credentials and discovered that his colleague was a fraud. The doctor noticed that Barnes closed the skin in surgery but not the layer underneath. For three years, Barnes saw 30-40 patients a day. He confessed that he had fooled so many people, so much so that he was beginning to believe the lie himself. In August, 1980 Barnes was charged with murder of a diabetic whose illness he had failed to diagnose.

Amazingly, three terms of imprisonment could not stop him. Barnes kept on impersonating a doctor for more than a decade, fooling even his fifth wife. By 1994, he had plied his trade for 18 years in at least 14 different clinics and medical offices, leading to his best job in 1996, working with a medical group which had the L.A. office of the FBI as its main client. Barnes even performed physical exams on about a hundred unsuspecting FBI agents! His luck ran out when the Irvine doctor reported him again and he was sentenced to 12 and a half years in prison.
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2001/10/26/48hours/main315999.shtml>

We don't know who is who in this world. Sheep and goats look alike. But we do know that all roads do not lead to heaven. That point is clear here that some are sent to eternal destruction and punishment.

Conclusion: Who is a sheep, and who is a goat? Final things will speak for themselves and sort themselves out ultimately in the end. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and

they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27-28). A goat is one who does not believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. You can fake watches, handbags, software, and even currency and signatures but you cannot fake salvation. You can repeat things and imitate faith but you cannot fool God. One thing is sure: we do not have the freedom or luxury to believe whatever we want in order to go to heaven.

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