

The Sheep & The Goats

Matthew 25:31-46

PPT Title

The Sheep & The Goats

Main Point: We show our love for Jesus by loving and serving other people.

Key Verse: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* – John 15:12

Props: Small plastic goat and sheep (or a picture of each). A piece of paper and marker or crayon.

BACKGROUND

Say: During the three years that Jesus traveled and taught, He used parables to help people understand important truths about God. Who remembers what a parable is? *A short story. A story that has more than one meaning. A story that seems simple, but isn't.* Toward the end of Jesus' three-year ministry, as it got closer and closer to the time when He would be crucified, He started telling stories that talked about a man who went away for a while and then came back.

For example, in the parable of the Ten Talents, we learned that a man returned from a long trip to see what his servants had done with gifts they had been given before he left. Two servants were faithful with their gifts and were rewarded by their master, but the third servant didn't even try to use his gift. Because of this, it was taken away from him completely. In today's parable—The Parable of The Sheep & The Goats—we will learn about a shepherd who returns to divide his flock into two groups, sheep on one side and goats on the other. As we will see, one of these groups is rewarded by the shepherd, and the other group is sent away from the shepherd and punished. Let's read about the sheep and the goats together in Matthew 25:31-46.

Teacher Note: There is a great potential for misunderstanding with this parable if it is not viewed in conjunction with the entirety of Jesus' teaching and the whole truth of scripture. Many people have used The Sheep & The Goats to argue that "getting into heaven" is merely a matter of doing good works or being a good person. But the gospel clearly teaches that there is only one way to be made right with God: the blood of Jesus, shed to make atonement for sin once and for all (Romans 5:8-10) and our belief in Him (John 3:16). Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly states, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."* (NIV)

Jesus told this parable not to imply that works bring salvation, but to show that there are many who merely pretend to know and love God, saying the right things, observing the right rituals, but never truly living a changed life that loves others like He has loved us. Jesus' teaching in this parable is echoed elsewhere in scripture, especially Leviticus 19:18, James 2:26, and 1 John 4:19.



SHEEP VS. GOATS

Say: *"The Son of Man will come in all His glory. All the angels will come with Him.*

Then He will sit on His throne in the glory of heaven. All the nations will be gathered in front of Him. He will separate the people into two groups. He will be like a shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep to His right and the goats to His left.” – Matthew 25:14-15

Teacher Note: Those hearing this parable would have been familiar with the process of sorting the flocks. During the day, sheep and goats would mingle, grazing together and roaming where they pleased. But at night, their needs were different, and they would be separated.

Hold up the plastic sheep in one hand and the plastic goat in the other. Say: Before we go any further it might be interesting to see how sheep and goats are different. They might look similar and make noises that are almost the same, but their personalities and behaviors are very, very different!



Say: This little goat looks cute and innocent doesn't he? But anyone who has ever spent time with goats knows that they are trouble. Goats are very independent animals. If the shepherd decided to go on vacation for a week and left the goats to survive on their own, they could probably do it.

Goats also have huge appetites and will eat anything and everything to satisfy their hunger. A shepherd has to be careful, because a mama goat will often eat every bit of the food put out for her babies, leaving them to go hungry. She just uses her head to bump them out of the way so she can have their dinner!

Another thing about goats is that they're motivated by their own desires. For example, let's say a goat likes the way his shepherd's hair tastes. He is always sneaking up behind the shepherd and trying to take a bite. The shepherd doesn't like this of course, and punishes the goat when he does it. But the goat can't stop thinking about how good that hair tastes! So as soon as the shepherd lies down to take a nap, that goat is right there, chewing on the sleeping shepherd's hair and hopefully avoiding any punishment. Goats love doing what they want more than they love pleasing the shepherd.



Say: Now let's look at sheep. From a distance, sheep might look like they've got it all together, hanging out in their pasture, grazing on yummy grass all day, playing with other sheep in the sunshine. But the truth is, sheep require so much help to stay alive! Did you know that if a sheep falls on its back, it can't figure out how to get up without help and will eventually die if the shepherd doesn't show it how to roll over and stand up again? Also, sheep have a strong tendency to panic and run around wildly when they are stressed out about something. If a car drives by and honks its horn, the whole flock of sheep might spend the next two hours running in circles and bumping into the walls and fences surrounding their pasture.

But sheep also feel very calm when their shepherd is around. They will follow him anywhere, because they have learned to trust him. They know that when it rains, the shepherd is the one who gently moves them to shelter. When they are hungry, the shepherd will take them to a pasture with tall, tasty grass or give them other food to fill their rumbling tummies. They know that the shepherd is the one who cares for all their needs.

Application: Here's something interesting. Did you know that all throughout the Bible, God says that we are His sheep? Psalm 95:7 says, *"He is our God. We are the sheep belonging to His flock. We are the people He takes good care of. Listen to His voice today."*

And Mark 6:34 says, *"When Jesus came ashore, he saw a large crowd. He felt deep concern for them. They were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching*

*He is our God
We are the sheep belonging
to His flock. We are the people
He takes good care of.
Listen to His voice today.
Psalm 95:7*

them many things.”



Think about what we just learned about sheep. They are totally helpless without their shepherd to guide them and take care of them. We're like those sheep, and God is our good shepherd. We belong completely to the Good Shepherd. He cares for us and would never leave us completely alone. Because of that, we can trust Him to give us everything we need.

WHO ARE THE SHEEP?

Say: Now let's get back to our parable and see what happens next. Remember, the shepherd has divided the sheep and goats, with sheep on the right and goats on the left. You'll notice that from this point on in the parable, Jesus doesn't talk about the shepherd any more. He talks about a King. Jesus is our Good Shepherd, but He is also the King above all kings, and He is coming back someday to rule over all the earth. And in this parable Jesus tells us that the first thing He's going to do when He returns is decide who's a sheep and who's a goat.



"Then the King will speak to those on his right. He will say, 'My Father has blessed you. Come and take what is yours. It is the kingdom prepared for you since the world was created. 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. I needed clothes. And you gave them to me. I was sick. And you took care of me. I was in prison. And you came to visit me.'" – Matthew 25:34-36

Say: It sounds like the sheep did a good job, doesn't it? But what Jesus said might seem a little confusing. Jesus said they fed **HIM** when He was hungry. And they gave **HIM** a drink when He was thirsty. They made friends with **HIM** when He was lonely. And they came to see **HIM** when He was in the hospital or in prison.

What does this mean? How can I possibly be one of the sheep when I've never even met Jesus in person, let alone made Him a turkey sandwich for lunch! The people who were in the sheep category were confused too. Here's what they said:



"Then the people who have done what is right will answer Him. 'Lord,' they will ask, 'when did we see You hungry and feed You? When did we see You thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You as a stranger and invite You in? When did we see You needing clothes and give them to You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?'" – Matthew 25:37-39

Say: We know from some of the other parables we've studied that Jesus always had a good answer when people were confused. He knew that His parables were often kind of mysterious and hard to understand. That's exactly what He wanted them to be! He wanted people to think hard about what He was saying. But Jesus never, ever left people with any doubt about what He meant. That's why the King in the story of The Sheep & The Goats gives a very clear answer to the sheep's question. He says,

"The King will reply, 'What I'm about to tell you is true. Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'" — Matthew 25:40

The King—Jesus—told the sheep that because they have loved and cared for the people around them, they have loved and cared for Him. The sheep get invited into the kingdom of God.

But here's something really important to remember. **The sheep have not earned their place in the kingdom through the good things they did.** There are not enough good deeds in the world to change the fact that we have been separated from God and His kingdom by our sin. Romans 3:23 says, *"Everyone has sinned. No one*

measures up to God's glory."



If we keep reading in Romans 3, we see what DOES make us part of the kingdom of God. Verses 24 and 25 say, "The free gift of God's grace makes all of us right with Him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free. God gave Him as a sacrifice to pay for sins. So He forgives the sins of those who have faith in His blood."

That's pretty exciting stuff! Because God loves us so much and doesn't want our sin to keep us from having a relationship with Him forever. So He sent Jesus to pay the price for our disobedience. Because He died on the cross, we can be part of the kingdom of God forever if we simply believe in what Jesus and what He did for us.

Application: When we trust in Jesus and believe that He died so that our sins could be forgiven, something happens. We change. We're not the same as we were before we decided to love and trust Jesus. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 5:15-17.

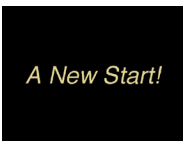
"Christ died for everyone. He died so that those who live should not live for themselves anymore. They should live for Christ. He died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we don't look at anyone the way the world does. At one time we looked at Christ in that way. But we don't anymore.

Anyone who believes in Christ is a new creation. The old is gone! The new has come!"



Write the word "sin" on the piece of paper repeatedly using a dark colored marker or crayon. Say: What if someone wrote each of your sins on a piece of paper as soon as you committed them. Everything you've ever done to disobey God is on this paper. After a few years, the paper would be really full! But then one day, you decide to trust Jesus and believe that He died to pay the penalty for all these sins. Right then and there, it's like the paper record of all your sins has been torn up and thrown away.



Tear up the paper and throw the pieces in a trash can. When we decide to follow Jesus, we get a brand new start. We get to live the life He wants us to live. And He wants us to love the people around us because He loves them (and us!) so much. When He was on earth, Jesus said there were just two things we needed to remember: First, He told us to love God. And then He told us to love others like He loves us.

Application: That's why in this parable, the sheep were able to do lots of things to show love to other people. It's like He's pouring all this love into their hearts, and they can't help but pour love out into other people's lives. You might say that the good things the sheep did were evidence that Jesus was working in their lives.

None of the good deeds that Jesus mentions are hard to do. He doesn't say that the sheep gave millions of dollars to their church. He doesn't say that they wrote a thousand page book about God. It doesn't say that they moved into a cardboard box and ate only cockroaches so that others could live in their home and eat all their food.



It's easy to show the kind of love Jesus talked about. Do you know of someone who doesn't have enough to eat? Let them share your sandwich. If someone is thirsty, offer them a cup of water. Is someone at school lonely and friendless? Sit by them at lunch or invite them to your house on the weekend. And if your grandma is sick, make her a card or call her up on the phone or go to her house to give her a hug. That's all He asks. And when we do those simple things, it's like we're doing them for Jesus. He must be so happy when we love other people that way, don't you think?

WHAT ABOUT THE GOATS?

Say: Now, back to parable. What do you think Jesus is going to tell the goats? Let's

read Matthew 25:41-46.

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'You are cursed! Go away from me into the fire that burns forever. It has been prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry. But you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty. But you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger. But you did not invite me in. I needed clothes. But you did not give me any. I was sick and in prison. But you did not take care of me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty and not help you? When did we see you as a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison and not help you?'

"He will reply, 'What I'm about to tell you is true. Anything you didn't do for one of the least important of these, you didn't do for me.'

"Then they will go away to be punished forever. But those who have done what is right will receive eternal life."

Say: The goats were living a selfish life. They saw lots of people in need, but did nothing for them. They were not like the sheep, who had been given a brand new way of seeing other people when they trusted Jesus. The goats had not accepted the love of Christ, so they didn't have His love to give to other people. Sadly, when the King comes back to sort the sheep and the goats, the goats will not get to be with Him forever.

Teacher Note: "The attitude of those who had failed was: 'If we had known it was you, we would gladly have helped. But we thought it was only some common man who wasn't worth helping.' It is still true that there are those who will help if they are given praise and thanks and publicity. But to help like that is not to help, it is to pander to self-esteem. Such help is not generosity; it is disguised selfishness. The help which wins the approval of God is that which is given for nothing but the sake of helping." — William Barclay (1907-1978), Biblical scholar and theologian

Application: When you know how much Jesus loves you and how much He did for you on the cross, you are literally overflowing with His love. You can't help but love other people like He loves you. And when you serve them, you are also serving Jesus. But if you ignore and reject the love that Jesus offers, you will never see other people the way He sees them. You will never be able to serve them unselfishly and completely. And in the parable of The Sheep & The Goats, Jesus tells us that the kingdom belongs only to those who love Him and love others.

PPT Key Verse

Key Verse: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* – John 15:12

PPT Main Point

Main Point: We show our love for Jesus by loving and serving other people.