

**This sermon was preached on the Feast of Christ the King
at the Centurion West Presbyterian Church, on 20 November 2011.**

“About Sheep and Goats”

Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Matt. 25:31: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him! -

Introduction: Today we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King! On this last Sunday of the Church Year, and as we look forward to the first Advent Sunday next week, we celebrate the majesty and the glory of our Head en King, Jesus Christ, who enthroned in heaven, rule and reign for our salvation and lead his people in the triumph of his resurrection and exaltation.

Yet this gospel truth brings us to a complex question: If Jesus is King and Lord, why are so many things still wrong, impure and painful in this world? If the Messianic Kingdom, promised in the Old and New Testaments, came about when Jesus went to heaven to be crowned King of the universe, of heaven and earth, and if he is in control of everything, how must we understand the experience that so much of our lives is still about injustice, sadness, sin and death?

The answer simply is: Until Jesus comes again *there are both goats and sheep in the world.* Christ leads and guides his sheep amidst the reality of us knowing that the sheep and goats have not yet been separated. But also that Jesus tends his sheep and leads them to his new heaven and earth and glorious dominion, in spite of the fact that his sheep follows him while goats are all around: so influential and seemingly winning every day!

1. First of all, the truth is that there one day will be this separation of the sheep and the goats. *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.* ³³ *He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left!* *Matt. 25: 32.*

There will be a judgment day. King Jesus is coming again. The Son of Man will come in his glory and he will sit on his throne as the royal Judge of all. He will come “to judge the living and the dead.” (Apostles Creed) And in this judgment of all people, there will be a separation: *“He will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left.”* **There is no middle ground.** There are those on his right hand, and there are those on his left hand. There are only sheep and goats. There are no “in-betweens”! Just sheep and goats. That’s not always so apparent and not even always so visible in this life. But it will be on the Day of Christ the King.

And it will make an important difference whether you are a sheep or a goat. Their destinations are different. To the goats, those on his left, the King will say, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

But the sheep, the righteous ones on the King's right hand, will go into eternal life; they will inherit his kingdom. This refers to the blessed reality of a new earth and a new heaven. There will be a judgment day, and it will result in an eternal separation of sheep and goats.

2. **Secondly, the truth about sheep and goats is that this judgment will be on the basis of how we lived**, what our values were and whether we showed the nature of being one of Christ's sheep, or if we lived like a goat! The King will judge us according to our nature and deeds. He will say, "*I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink.*" And then, on the other hand he will say, "*I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink.*" So it will be our living or not living according to the standards of love and mercy of the Kingdom of Christ the King, which also will be the standard for the judgment day.

This is consistent with the teaching of Scripture in other passages. For example, earlier in Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, "*The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*"

Paul also teaches in 2 Corinthians: "*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*" In the last chapter of Revelation, we read, "*Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.*"

This then is the Church's teaching that judgment will be according to the Kingdom standard of love and mercy and whether we complied. Works of love will be given as evidence when the righteous are rewarded. Works of mercy *not done* likewise will be given as evidence when those on the left are told to depart. So the truth about sheep and goats is first, that there will be a judgment, a separation, and *second, that this judgment will be according to the fact whether we lived as the sheep of Christ - or like goats!*

3. And yet, it is important never to forget that, **thirdly, we all know that it is only faith in Christ that can produce the Kingdom works that righteous sheep do**. Notice what the King says when he commends their deeds of mercy: "*I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink.*" He also says "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*"

Everything is centred on our relationship with the King and the person of the King. If our works of love are done as a result of our faith relationship with Christ, then it is regarded as works of his Kingdom. ***If we have is no relationship with Christ and has not been done for him, then even what is considered good works in the unbelieving world, make no difference to our status in the Kingdom of Christ.*** We must be linked to Christ and his goodness. We must live as a sheep in his fold and therefore receive the gracious gift *by which bad people are accounted as good*-in order for there to be any works of love and mercy to speak of as works of and for Christ. Faith in Christ is the key as to whether our lives will be judged to be works of his Kingdom, or not.

4. So in the final analysis, **it is faith in Christ the King that saves.** Following the King, accepting him as King and Lord of our lives, turns our lives around and the evidence that our lives have been turned around from being goats to sheep, is a free gift! Pure grace!

Only Jesus Christ the King gives us this miracle, that we are redeemed from belonging to the flock of goats and turned into his sheep. His precious blood washes away our sins. His righteousness is imputed to us as a gift. His perfect holiness purifies our imperfect lives, and his Spirit turns us into people who do everything for him in obedience to our majestic King and Lord! It is called being born again, rebirth, regeneration!

So how do we understand this relationship of faith and works when it comes to the judgment day? **Faith alone saves by grace, but the faith never stands alone.** It is always accompanied by the works of the Kingdom of the King that saved us. Saving faith will produce Kingdom works. So the works are the evidence and the proof, *that a living faith was indeed present in the believer.* Faith works. Like a good tree, it bears good fruit.

Only justified people, who are led by the Spirit of Christ, can do the good works for the King. Without faith and Christ as Mediator, none of our works can please God. *'You gave me food'* is mentioned as the fruit and evidence of the righteousness of the heart and of faith. In this way Scripture relates the acts of righteousness, love and mercy, and the status of the heart as the throne of Christ the King.

So we never look to our works to save us. ***Notice that the righteous, the sheep, are truly surprised and amazed when their works of love and mercy are mentioned:*** *"Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and in prison, they ask. They weren't busy keeping record of what they did for the Lord as they lived their lives in the Kingdom of Christ. There was no score keeping of good and bad. Instead, their lives lived for Christ are mentioned to show that they did indeed have a living faith that was connected to Christ and came from love for him and those that belong to him, even when they were "the least of his brothers and sisters."* Faith in Christ will produce works for Christ, in granting the experience of the Kingdom to those suffering because of the injustice and pain and sin of this world.

The righteous do not proudly keep score of their Kingdom works. **They look to the finished work of Christ, who alone can produce works in us that are accepted as good in God's eyes.** The key to living and experiencing the Kingdom of Christ is to have a relationship with Christ. It ensures that our sins have been forgiven, washed away by his blood that was shed on the cross. This is the only way through which our impure, selfish lives can be wiped away and be replaced with the very works of Christ the King.

This is the good news of this day and of this feast of Christ the King. God has forgiven us for the sake of Jesus! And now Jesus is our life, and his life will stand in the judgment, for this is the good news of the gospel: **your Judge is also your Saviour!**

5. This is how we glorify Christ the King!

We live for him. We do things similar to what he did when he was on earth. We give him food and water and clothes and love and compassion when it is direly needed. But how do we do this? Jesus said: *“Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me!”* And so, we make his will visible, we show his heart and we allow the light of his dominion to become visible in this dark world. Then other people can also believe **that Christ the King, the Messiah, indeed reigns!** They can believe that they too may believe in him and be saved through faith in him, by grace.

Conclusion: By God’s grace you will receive the reward of the righteous, which is eternal life in his Kingdom. God in his grace has made you one of his sheep. Now follow the Good Shepherd, do the works of love and mercy that God has prepared for you to do, and receive the eternal kingdom God has prepared for you as well.

Or you one day may hear from the exalted King on the glorious throne: *“I was hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and imprisoned, and you gave me nothing...”*

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God!

Amen.