

Read: ³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² 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.

1. What's the difference between sheep and goats?

I think the answer depends a lot on who you're talking to. Some people say the difference is clearly about IQ in favour of the sheep! What do you think - can you tell the difference between a sheep and a goat? I have to admit, being a kid from the suburbs of Melbourne, I'm no expert. So being it's my first year as an Under Shepherd of Almighty God, I thought I'd better brush up on my knowledge. So as we do, I googled "Sheep" on the web. As it turns out, it's pretty simple telling the difference between sheep and goats!

A goat's tail goes up and a sheep's tail hangs down and is often docked for obvious reasons! Diet is also a giveaway – goats are browsers, sheep are grazers. Sheep have thick curly horns and goats have thin narrow horns. Apparently sheep hang around together more than goats – who I learned stink more than sheep! Do you think the website might be biased towards sheep?

So as it turns out it's not that hard to separate the sheep from the goats! Or is it...?

Pray: *Lord Jesus, we thank and praise you today that you will come again in glory with all the angels and judge us and the world. We ask that you would prepare our hearts to hear the truth of your word. Thank you that your love speaks the truth to us and calls us to repentance and faith in you. Holy Spirit be at work convicting us of our sins and lead us to the healing and renewing grace of the cross so that we might live as people who bear the beautiful fruit of a living and active faith – this day and always until you come to take us home. Amen.*

2. According to sheep101 it's simple to tell the difference between sheep and goats.

Jesus says in the gospel today that at the end of time when He comes in glory with all the angels, ³² *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.*

When you look into this passage of scripture, I wonder what you see looking back at you. Do you see a sheep or a goat? How can you tell a sheep from a goat when it comes to the last judgement of all people? *It's not so simple now is it?*

We need to tread very carefully here. You might be thinking well the bible says, *"Do not judge so you will not be judged"* and claim to live by that each day. (Matt 7:1) Perhaps on a good day both you and I think this way.

But what about when you get angry and frustrated - what happens then? What happens in the heat of an argument or when someone's words or actions cut you to the heart? Are you left thinking, *"Do not judge so you will not be judged?"* Or do you go for it and say things that you regret – or things you should regret according to the word of God? And if you're an expert in silence, remember there is someone who can see your thought-life too!

One of the most regrettable things people think and say to each other are the words: **"Go to hell!"** They're the worst, most unloving, Satan inspired three words you could say to another child of God. It's a judgment call of someone who puts themselves in the place of God and eternally condemns another person by their words. And it's not just 'go to hell,' there are countless variations that roll off the tongue that judge and condemn people that God loves - and who Jesus died for.

To judge means to separate. That makes us curious... For many people they think one day God will separate all the good people from the bad people! For them the sheep are the good folks and the goats are the evil doers – what they really mean are people who aren't like them... The trouble is it is not so easy to work out who is good and who is bad. In fact we often misjudge other people every day.

Judgement belongs to God alone. It belongs to the Good Shepherd who doesn't merely look at outward appearances, or act out of hurt or malice like we often do; but who examines the intricate details and even the motivations of our hearts. Its God alone who acts as judge in eternal matters and not flawed human beings like you and me... and that's a great thing

3. God won't use human criteria on judgement day – he'll use Divine wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

That's wonderful news especially when the text seems to say that the sheep on Jesus right who go to heaven are people who do the right kind of things. What we might call 'good people.' These people are commended for looking after the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the poor and so on. Those who are rejected are condemned for failing to help others when they could have.

Will heaven or eternal separation from God hinge on you and the kind of things you did or didn't do? What does Jesus mean? If you haven't been reading your scriptures you might get stuck here! We need a big picture understanding of the bible to get what Jesus is saying. We need to think. So I ask you: **What sits at the very centre and core of the bible's message?** [of course it's Jesus and the cross!]

Your life, forgiveness and your eternal hope doesn't hinge on you, but on Jesus and His work for you on the cross. He is the source and foundation of your salvation.

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.
- He is the Good Shepherd who rescues His sheep,
- who leads them back onto His path when they stray from the truth,
- when they wander away because they're not listening to Him.

What matters on Judgment Day will be your attitude and relationship to Jesus Christ – not a catalogue of your finest deeds. They're simply the fruit of a living faith – ministry done in the name of Jesus – but no-one earns their way into heaven.

Jesus said: **"My sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me and I give them eternal life.....whoever believes in him is not condemned.....whoever believes and is baptised will be saved.....St Paul wrote *For it is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works...*"**

Entry to heaven is a matter of who you believe in and trust in every aspect of your life. Believe in Christ and be saved by Christ, trust in yourself and be judged by yourself. The righteous in the Bible are those who look to Jesus for their righteousness, not their good lives.

4. Why does Jesus talk about feeding, clothing, visiting and showing mercy?

Imagine if I told Janelle that I truly loved her but was outright vicious whenever I saw her family? What would Janelle think if I mistreated her friends every time they came to our house or we met them out somewhere? Would she feel loved by me? Would I be showing love to her?

Jesus talks about feeding, clothing, visiting and showing mercy simply because that's the beautiful fruit that comes forth from a living relationship with Jesus! So I can say, "I love God" and "I believe in Jesus" but the real evidence of this will be seen in how I love and interact with the people of God – especially the poor, hungry, the sick, victims of injustice and people who are locked in prison – even if you think they're getting what they deserve. That's the test of your relationship with Jesus – loving other people as you love the Lord.

Jesus said: ***"Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine you did for me" and "whatever you did not do for the least of these you did not do for me."*** Jesus isn't saying do these things and get into heaven, he's saying these are the actions of a disciple walking in my grace and love – see they can't help but serve.

5. Those acts of service, done in faith will be the source of great surprise when Jesus returns!

The two sets of people in Jesus' story are both surprised by his judgement. Those who are saved are amazed that Jesus saw the most insignificant things they did coming from faith in him. Those who are rejected are surprised that Jesus saw what they didn't do for him.

Did you notice the sins of those who were saved never even got a mention? That's because they stand before God as forgiven people. The only things Jesus will bring to mind in the end are the acts of love and kindness that came from faith in him and love for him. ***"Come you who are blessed by my Father - take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."***

On the other hand if you live life without Jesus, not wanting his forgiveness and not looking to him in faith, rejecting him and living for yourself – that's how you'll be seen and judged - without Jesus. Not only will the bad things you've done count against you but the good things you failed to do will also count against you. ***"Then he will say to those on his left: Depart from me you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."***

6. This picture of the last judgement is a confronting one.

It's a picture we had better not minimise or else we belittle the death of Jesus. Hell, which is separation from God, is real, but Jesus said it was prepared for the devil and evil angels, not for us, and we only need to start worrying about that if we reject the Good Shepherd and live our lives without him.

I asked you earlier when you look into this passage what do you see staring back at you – a sheep or a goat? When I look and the law stings me for all my flaws and failures – I see a goat staring back

me. But when I look at the cross I see God looking at me as one of His sheep – a forgiven sheep that Jesus died for. What do you see?

As you walk out of here today will you look to Christ, will you thank him, trust him and love him - not only by your thoughts and words but by seeing him in each and every person you meet on your journey this week? Instead of making judgement calls on others, will you treat them the same way you would treat Jesus? That's the call of Jesus on your life.

May God give you strength to follow through. **Amen.**