

Summer 2021 Newsletter
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WHO ARE THE GOATS?

*Then the disciples came and said to [Jesus], “Why do you speak to them in parables?”
... he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven,
but to them it has not been given.” (Matthew 13:10,11(English Standard Version)*

From his baptism at Jordan until just shortly before his crucifixion, a period of 3½ years, Jesus “went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people...and great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.” (Matt. 4:23,25, *ESV*) A preacher with the amazing power to heal the sick and afflicted, should surely have very soon converted the nation to his teachings. The Scriptures say that great crowds thronged about him, (Mark 5:24) and on at least one occasion, five thousand men, plus women and children who were unnumbered, had assembled to hear Jesus’ teaching. (Luke 9:11-17) That evening, Jesus miraculously fed the whole multitude with five loaves of bread and two fish.

On the day after feeding the five thousand, the crowds again were seeking Jesus. Jesus told them, “I am the bread of life” and they would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood if they would follow him. (John 6:48-58) After this saying, many of the people were discouraged, or disgusted, and followed him no longer. Even his closest disciples had qualms, and perceiving this, Jesus asked them, “Do you want to go away as well?” But Peter affirmed, “to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:67-69) So why did Jesus make his teachings so hard to understand?

Among the recorded teachings of Jesus, as reported in the four gospels, there are approximately 42 parables plus other one or two line metaphors. Parables are word pictures or stories used to teach a lesson in which the things spoken of stand for something else. Jesus used parables to illustrate characteristics of people, places, and things. Since parables are highly symbolic, there were times when Jesus told his disciples the meanings of his stories so they would understand, but for the masses who came to hear him and to be healed, he made no effort to explain.

Sensing the confusion in the minds of the people, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand...but blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.” (Matt. 13:10-17)

It is evident that the primary goal of the preachers of today is to bring in converts. They ask only that the name of Jesus be accepted. But Jesus was apparently not seeking such casual believers. If he were, he would not have told the multitudes to eat

his flesh and drink his blood. Nor would he have hidden the meaning of his words in parables that he knew they could neither understand nor appreciate.

No. Jesus' teachings were to prepare those whom he called a "little flock." (Luke 13:32) James at the Jerusalem council characterized this same group as "a people for God's name." (Acts 15:14-17) In his last recorded prayer, Jesus, knowing he was soon to die, said "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word...for I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them...I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me for they are yours." (John 17:6-9) Does that



mean Jesus didn't care about the multitudes? Not at all. Matthew says, "When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matt 9:36)

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One of the best-known passages of scripture is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But verses 17 and 18 are not so well known, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (vss.17,18)

Why, then, did Jesus withhold information from the crowds who came to hear him and explain only to his disciples? Why did he set as a condition of being his disciple "drinking his blood," a prohibition from God from the time of the flood and reinforced in the Law given on Mount Sinai (Gen.9:4; Lev.17:11) Why did he make the cost of discipleship so high? (Luke 18:18-26; 14:26,33) If



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Answers to these questions begin in Eden. God created man to **live** on the earth. He did not create a dying race, but one that was intended to live forever and fill the earth. However, there was one condition; his human creation must obey his laws. We all know the outcome. Adam and Eve listened to Satan's lie and disobeyed God's simple test of obedience. As a result, the sentence of death

was pronounced upon Adam and, consequently, upon all his offspring, the whole human race. Hence, when the scripture says humanity was "condemned already," it is because that condemnation was passed from father to son and mother to daughter for all of mankind's history since the original sentence was pronounced in Eden. For that reason, John seeing Jesus declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the **sin** of the world." The "sin" (singular) of the world is the original, all-encompassing sin of Adam which all have inherited.

But Jesus came to save the race, not by his teachings, but by his **death as the ransom price** for Adam. Jesus explained his mission in the cryptic words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.**" (John 12:24; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12-21) The Apostle wrote, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels **for the suffering of death**, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should **taste death for every man.**" (Heb. 2:9) Jesus' death did not purchase just a favored few, but rather the whole family of Adam. John wrote, "He is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our [the church's] sins: and **not for ours only**, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

Therefore, if Jesus satisfied the penalty for the sin of Adam in Eden and, by extension, for the sins of the whole world, then all mankind is guaranteed a return from death. Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when **all** who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." (John 6:28,29 ESV) Notice that Jesus did not say the resurrection was only for the good and evildoers are excluded. They are **all** included in the promise of life. However, the good rise to reap the rewards of the Kingdom, while those who have done evil in this life come forth to be taught righteousness (Isa. 26:9) and be judged to see if they will have learned to do good.



Although the King James Version uses the word "damnation" and many other versions use "condemnation," which conveys almost the same idea to our minds, the Greek word used is *krisis* and means a period of trial, a tribunal or judgment, not the final sentence. Paul puts it this way; "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death." (1 Cor.15:22-26)

With the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, found in Matthew

25:31-46, Jesus gave us an insight into the conditions required for life in the Kingdom. The parable is set at the time **“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him.”** Since Jesus’ first advent was for “the suffering of death,” the time of this scenario has to be at a future time, when the Lord would return in power and great glory. **“Then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.”**

Flocks of both sheep and goats were commonly kept in Israel, so Jesus often used sheep as representative of traits desired in his people. There is a great difference between the characteristics of sheep from goats. Sheep are docile and flock together and quietly submit to the shepherd’s will. Goats, on the other hand, are ornery and want to take their own way. Sheep feed where the shepherd leads them, whereas goats will eat not only the meadow grass, but all other sorts of vegetation as well. Jesus said, “The sheep hear my voice.” (John 10:27) They are content to feed on the pure Word of God and do not go looking for the “other food” of human philosophies. They are content with “thus sayeth the Lord,” for every question.



Subsequent to the call and development of the “little flock,” Jesus also indicated that there were “other sheep which are not of this fold...and they shall hear my voice” (John 10:16). Sheep also illustrate the qualities needed in all those of mankind deemed fit to inherit the Kingdom of earth. (Matt. 6:10, 5:5)

“Then shall the King say unto [the sheep] on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? ...And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these least my brethren, ye did it unto me.”

The Prophet Isaiah paints a word-picture of the Kingdom in chapter 35, describing the earth restored to Edenic perfection and the people healed from the ravages of the permission of evil which now prevails in the earth. He describes a “highway of holiness” on which the resurrected shall travel. They will “come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads...and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” For this “sheep class” of mankind, acts of goodness and kindness will have become so ingrained in them that they will hardly know that they are doing them. The lessons of the

permission of evil learned, they will have come to appreciate and do God’s will, (Matt. 6:10) and will thus be fit to live forever in the Kingdom of God.

There is another principle illustrated here that is applicable for us today. We might have thought at some time, “I would have been happy to carry Jesus’ cross,” but is there someone who is struggling under a cross of illness, family troubles, financial burdens, or depression? Have we volunteered to help with their cross? Remember, if it is done to the least of the Lord’s people, it is as though it is done directly to him.

“Then shall he say also unto [the goats] on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.” Let us not be tempted to jump out of the figurative imagery of this parable to take the phrase “eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels” literally. This fire, as well as the “goats” which are cast into it, is symbolic. Fire is often used in scriptures to indicate complete destruction. After a consuming fire, nothing recognizable is left of the object burned, therefore it is a very apt picture of total annihilation.

This same illustration is found in Revelation 20:10-15. (“Revelation of Jesus Christ which he... sent and signified {symbolized} to his servant John”—Rev.1:1) In this passage, not only are Satan and his angels cast into the “Lake of Fire,” but Death and Hades are also cast into it. The scriptures themselves tell us the Lake of Fire “is the Second Death.” Why “Second” death? Because we are now dying the “first death,” the result of the curse put upon our father Adam. But our recovery out from this death was paid for by the death of Jesus. (1 Cor.15:21)

So, who are the goats? Those of resurrected mankind who, after having experienced the blessings of the kingdom, still prove to be unregenerate, incorrigible, and who still harbor longings for sin. (Rev. 21:8) **“these shall go away into eternal punishment: [“eternal” because there is no recovery from Second death—“Christ dieth no more”—Heb. 6:9,10] God will not tolerate rebellion from his creatures another time.** (Acts 17:30,31)

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