

# The Sheep and the Goats

## Matthew 25:31-46

This study look at the same passage as the sermon outline (pp.16-18). It can be used either before or after hearing the sermon, or quite separately. However, if used without the sermon, it may be helpful for the group leader to read through the sermon outline beforehand. The main study is questions 1 to 14. The section at the end called "Digging deeper" is intended for those who would like to explore some of the more challenging aspects of the passage.

1. In this passage, Jesus describes Himself in three different ways (v.31,32,34). What are these titles or descriptions, and what are the implications of each?
2. We are described as sheep or goats. What are the general characteristics of sheep and of goats? (Which are docile and obedient? Which have "attitude"? Which harmlessly graze the grass? Which browse destructively on trees and shrubs?)
3. Which particular characteristic is used by the shepherd (King) to separate the sheep (righteous) from the goats (unrighteous)?
4. Read verse 40. Is the King looking at whether His disciples cared for humanity in general or for other Christians?
5. Can you think of other parts of the Bible where we are told to care for our fellow-believers? (If you want some verses to get you started, try dipping into this list. Song of Songs 1:6; Matthew 10:42; Acts 2:44-45; Acts 11:28-29; Romans 15:25-26; Galatians 6:10; Hebrews 6:10; Hebrews 13:1; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:11,14,16-17; 1 John 4:7,11-12)
6. How often do we have opportunity to feed the hungry, care for the sick, visit Christians in prison etc? Do we take those opportunities? If we do not have the opportunity to do it personally, what other possibilities are there for helping our needy brothers and sisters?
7. Sometimes people who need our help are ungrateful. Sometimes we feel too tired or there are other things we would prefer to do instead. Can the words of verses 40 and 45 help us in these situations?
8. Christ's command to "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27) is so well known that many people who know nothing else of His teachings can quote it, and rightly interpret "neighbour" as everybody. So how does this fit with the verses which tell us specifically to love our fellow Christians? (If in doubt, turn to Galatians 6:10.)
9. How do the sheep react when the King praises them? (v.37-39) Why do you think they are so surprised? What can we learn from Isaiah 55:8-9 about the Lord's viewpoint and priorities?
10. We have seen that small favours and kindnesses to other Christians are treasured up by the Lord for the Day of Judgment. How should this affect our attitude to Christians (perhaps including ourselves) who, in human terms, may not seem to have "accomplished" much or may not have been very "visible" in their Christian ministry? See also Matthew 7:21-23.
11. The goats are not sent away for having committed sins like murder, theft or adultery. Their sins are "sins of omission". In the words of a traditional prayer of confession, they had "left undone the things which [they] ought to have done". What can we learn from this?

### Something to try at home

There are very few hymns or songs on the theme of caring for our fellow believers. Maybe some in the group would like to try and write one for the group to sing next time you meet. You could choose a well known tune and put some new words to it. Or else write both words and melody.

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12. How wonderful it is to think that we have the Lord Jesus Christ for our brother (v.40). There are other verses where this is mentioned. Divide up these examples among the members of the group and, after a few minutes, let each person in turn read out their verse and then share with the rest of the group their thoughts and feelings. Matthew 12:50; Matthew 28:10; John 20:17; Hebrews 2:11-12; Hebrews 2:17
13. The Bible recognises that we all sin and fall short. How then can anyone be righteous, like the sheep who are welcomed into the Kingdom? (Read Romans 3:20-24.)
14. So, if we do not earn our place in heaven by good deeds, why does this passage say they are so important? (Clue: think in terms of proof, evidence, results, fruit. Read John 13:35 and 1 John 3:14.)

### Digging deeper

15. Our passage describes the Last Judgment. Read Revelation 20:11-15 and see what more we can learn about this serious subject.
16. The King tells the righteous that the Kingdom they will inherit has been prepared for them (v.34). But the eternal fire to which the unrighteous are sent has been prepared for the devil and his angels (v.41). What is the significance of this difference?
17. What does Jesus say in this passage about the ultimate fate of those who do not put their faith in Him, as proved by their actions? (v.41,46)
18. Matthew's Gospel has much else to say about separation and judgment. Some examples are given in note 1 on the opposite page. What do these add to our understanding?