

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I don't think there is anything that is quite as nerve-racking to a teenager as pulling up to a now boring building called the DMV. You have spent time in class learning signs and rules. You have practiced for hours with other kids your age. You've listened to Dad give you pointers on the road, but now it's all on you. It's just you, and you assume some employee with a personal vendetta against teenagers who will now decide your fate as free or chained with a learner's permit, doomed to try again.

Our text begins as others of late with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, clearly laying out the signs that would accompany His Final Return: wars and rumors of wars, etc.

He shares five parables, each containing this point, which we have looked at many of through the past couple of weeks: You're Going to Need to Be Prepared. Being prepared means living life with the knowledge that He will return and that we will be held accountable.

The parable of the sheep and goats contains this same basic reminder of being ready but from a slightly different angle. Jesus again mentions that there will be a separation, but He adds that many people who think they are ready really aren't. Like a boy showing up for his driver's test, assuming that driving is just like riding his huffy bicycle. They're running with the goat gang and, thus, are totally unprepared to meet Christ.

Now, Sheep and goats are similar. They are similar sizes. They eat the same food; they sound the same. But of course, they are not the same.

We could go into the differences in unnecessary detail; this isn't a zoology lesson. Jesus picked two very similar animals to highlight the fact that many people who think that they are bound for heaven aren't. In other words, they are goats who think they are sheep. And you know who can tell the difference? The Shepherd., who has no trouble whatsoever differentiating between the two animals. **"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, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left."**

There is no hesitancy. No confusion. No second-guessing. The Shepherd knows exactly who are sheep and who aren't, and after separating the two, Jesus addresses the sheep. The sheep are shocked when they hear they are headed for heaven, which rings true. After all, isn't Grace just a little bit shocking? That after a lifetime of lies and excuses and relapses and broken promises that, Jesus really does deliver full and free forgiveness. But we will return to that later.

Then Jesus turns to those on His left and delivers this devastating declaration: **"Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."** End of the story? Actually, no. Those on His left reply, "Jesus, point of order, I'm not a goat. I'm a sheep!"

Jesus responds, "But you are not a sheep."

"Christ, there's where you're wrong, and let me tell you why. **"when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help You?"**

This begs the question: why, at this moment, the moment when God is fully revealing His power when the very elements themselves are melting, are those on His left arguing about whether they are sheep or goats? They didn't know because they had never listened to the Shepherd's voice in the first place.

Jesus tells us in **John 10:27**, **"My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow me."** And that voice soothes the worried conscience with words rich in mercy. It is a gentle voice that leads the sheep beside quiet waters of compassion. The sheep hear the Shepherd's voice and trust the Shepherd's voice when He tells them that they are saved by Grace alone.

Ah, but those on His left do not listen to that voice and have concluded that they know better than the Shepherd does. They have conjured up a different path to heaven based on this formula: "If I'm just nice enough and kind enough, tolerant enough and helpful enough. If I don't hurt too many people too often, then surely that has got to be good enough for God." They may wish that were true. They may even believe it is true. But it is not true. And it will never be true.

And the consequence for attempting to construct an alternative way to heaven is catastrophic. You see, God cannot be argued into letting someone into heaven.

The goat's formula just doesn't work. It doesn't work now. It won't work on Judgement Day.

And the great news is that it doesn't have to work because God has a plan, his plan, already in place. It's a plan for his sheep. It's a plan that involves you and me.

But what a different story for the sheep. It is not so much different as it is opposite. As the sheep are gathered and separated, God speaks to them as well. **"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"**

How opposite? The goats are sentenced to eternal punishment, and the sheep to an inheritance of eternal life. A kingdom blessed and gorgeous. Too wonderful to comprehend.

But not only that. As the sheep are called to their heavenly home, they are dumbfounded by the proposition. "Wait, Lord, this doesn't seem right. I think you must have me confused because I never saw you hungry, or thirsty. I never visited you and took care of you. Pardon my ignorance, but I think I belong over there with the goats."

While the goats have been looking at themselves and their actions and found themselves deserving of eternal life, the sheep have looked at their efforts and found themselves totally undeserving.

And you know why? It's because they have heard the voice of the shepherd. They have heard the voice of God, and through the words of the law, they have found themselves lacking. They have heard the commands of God and know that they do not stack up. They know, unlike those sheep, that they have not been nice enough, they have not been tolerant enough, or helpful enough to earn anything from God, let alone an eternity of paradise.

But they have listened to the other words of the shepherd. They have listened to the soothing words of God's grace. The words in the Gospel that beckon to the sinners far across the globe of sins forgiven in spite of worth. They have listened to the cry of God on the cross of "it is finished." They have heard the voice of the Shepherd who, who was raised from the dead and whom angels proclaimed would be coming back for him.

You Christians are those sheep. You are those sheep who have heard the Law and the Gospel. You are the sheep whom God has prepared a place for since before creation. You are they whom God will come and call to his right on the final day.

And when that day comes, and all nations are gathered before him. When the dead have been raised and all eyes in heaven and on earth on God on the throne. Do not be afraid, but rejoice. Because the voice that calls from that throne will call for you, he will call to you as a sheep of his flock.

So now, sheep, just listen. Listen to that voice that not only holds out the promise of eternal life but delivers on that promise. **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”**