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The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus' earthly ministry was drawing to a conclusion. He had entered Jerusalem amid popular acclaim (Matthew 21:9-11). This had set off a series of confrontations in the temple with the nation's religious leaders. That went on for more than two days, concluding with the Lord's lament over the city and its coming destruction (Matthew 21:12-23:39).

Jesus then retired to the Mount of Olives where He sat and talked with His disciples about things yet to be - Rome's devastation of Jerusalem, in glory to judge the world. His coming, He said, would be sudden and unannounced. They must be ready at all times (Matthew 24:1-44)). He used parables to enforce His teaching - ten bridesmaids awaiting the coming of the groom; servants working during their master's absence (Matthew 24:45-25:30). Then He spoke the words that are the consideration of this lesson, telling what will happen when He appears at last to sit in judgement of all mankind. His words are awesomely direct.

1. Describe your feelings the last time you saw video footage of starving children in Africa or some other "third world" country and there was an appeal for money.

2. Describe Jesus' second coming with elements drawn from these verses.

3. What characteristics of behavior do sheep and goats have that make this description of judgment understandable?

4. How does this picture of Jesus contrast with our picture of Him from the gospels when He walked the earth?

5. Verse 34 tells us that the kingdom belongs to those on the King's right hand through the blessing of *inheritance*. The subsequent verses indicate that those who inherit the kingdom will be those who have done faithful works of compassion. Does this mean that salvation must be earned? Explain.

6. Examine carefully the class of deeds done by those on the King's right. How difficult are they? Are they deeds that would be out of reach of anyone's ability? Explain.

7. "I believe in minding my own business." "I don't care to become involved with other people's problems." These are statements commonly heard today. When we hear such words, how should our understanding of this passage affect our response?

8. In what way does one's relationship with the King depend upon his relationship with the King's other subjects?

9. What is the fate of those on the King's left? Describe their fate as fully as you can using elements from verses 41-46.

10. What was conspicuously *missing* from the lives of those on the King's left? If explanations were to be allowed at judgement, what excuses might be offered by these people?

The Greatest Stories Ever Told

11. Some religious people today put their emphasis on moral virtue (i.e., don't smoke, don't drink, don't swear, don't lie, don't cheat, etc.) What does this account have to say to them?

12. Some today put their emphasis on the beliefs and ceremonies of their religion (i.e., baptized in the right way, communion at the right time, the right elements in worship, etc.). What does this account have to say to them?

13. Some today put their emphasis on how much they know about their religion and the Bible. What does this account have to say to them?

14. What hungry, naked, lonely, sick people are within your reach today? What are you doing about them?