

## E-Series

### Sheep and Goats (Continued)

**31** "When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. **32** Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, **33** putting sheep to his right and goats to his left. **34** "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. **35** And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, **36** I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.' **37** "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? **38** And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' **39 40** Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me - you did it to me.' **41** "Then he will turn to the 'goats,' the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. **42** And why? Because - I was hungry and you gave me no meal, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, **43** I was homeless and you gave me no bed, I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, Sick and in prison, and you never visited.' **44** "Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?' **45** "He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me - you failed to do it to me.' **46** "Then those 'goats' will be herded to their eternal doom, but the 'sheep' to their eternal reward."

—Matthew 25:31-46 (*The Message*)

Maybe I'm projecting my thoughts onto you, but I can almost sense your question about this passage from Matthew. "Is Jesus saying our salvation depends on our good works?"

If we only read this passage of Scripture, it's hard to think otherwise. What separates sheep and goats in this passage is what they DO.

I'm amazed that the next scene in Matthew doesn't have Peter or John with their hand raised. "Uh, Jesus, are you saying that we earn our salvation?" That would certainly have been the question I would have been asking. But, maybe that wasn't a question that Jesus was concerned with.

By the time we get to the Apostle Paul's writings (at least 30 years after Jesus' death), Paul is concerned with the difference between faith and works. Paul repeatedly says that it is by faith that we are saved. Faith, for Paul, was never our own achievement, but a response to God's good gift—grace. Grace, of course, cannot be earned. But, did Jesus draw a line between faith and works? How do you think about these matters

The book of James says, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). In other words, faith, if it is true faith, is always accompanied by works. Certainly Paul is right in saying that "by grace [we] are saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). But, that faith must, necessarily, lead to works.

Maybe for Jesus faith and works are inextricably linked. I don't know if that helps you in your interpretation of this passage, but it's how I try to make sense of it.



Trying to be a good sheep,  
*Pastor Michael*