

A day is coming when the King Jesus will descend on the clouds with all his holy angels. That will be some sight. Afraid you'll miss out on the spectacle? Don't worry about that. Jesus tells us that all the nations will be gathered before him. The Sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

And who will the judge be? Jesus. Does that surprise you? Some think of Jesus as a perpetual nice guy. But listen to some of his words on Judgment day: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels". There is a certain group of people that is so offensive to Jesus that he won't tolerate their presence on Judgment Day. Instead he'll send them to a place of eternal punishment. What will these people have done that's so offensive to Jesus? It's not so much what they have done as what they have failed to do. Listen to Jesus' assessment: "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me". Jesus does not say of this hell-bound group: "You sold drugs to pre-teens. You cheated on your spouse. You murdered unborn children. You ripped off your customers." By not mentioning these obvious sins Jesus is teaching us a sobering lesson. Don't think that everything is OK between God and you just because you haven't committed any "big" sins. If you've ever failed to serve those around you, if you've ever thought that your comfort was more important than someone else's, you're damned.

Come on, Pastor! Jesus can't be that strict? Is he really going to send me to hell because I didn't get off the couch to get my little brother a glass of water when he asked for one? And don't tell me Christians will get to heaven because they're always cheerfully serving others. Since Jesus is God, he is strict about sin. Failing to cheerfully serve another person even once makes us deserving of his wrath. But you would be correct in your assessment of Christians. We don't always cheerfully serve others. This is perhaps why Jesus doesn't compare the two Judgment Day groups to sheep and snakes but to sheep and goats, two animals that look very much alike. So what sets these two groups apart? F.L.U.F. Let's take a closer look at what this means. My friend, may all of us here today "Be a Sheep with FLUF"!

The first and most important distinction is faith. Those whom Jesus calls sheep are those who have faith in him. Not just faith that a guy named Jesus existed, but faith that he is the only one who can save us from our sins. Think of it like this. If I say: "I have faith in President Obama." I don't mean, "I believe Obama exists." I mean, "I think Obama can help the United States." Likewise those who have true faith in Jesus believe that he has saved them from an eternal future in hell when he lived a perfect life and paid for their sins on the cross. They understand that, like decoy flares dropped from a fighter jet to keep a heat-seeking missile from slamming into the plane, Jesus diverted to himself God's wrath originally meant for sinners. Now those who have saving faith in Jesus will show it in the way they love others. In fact on Judgment Day Jesus will point to this visible love as evidence of invisible faith. Jesus will say to the sheep, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:34b-36).

One Christian observed that Jesus will not say: "I was sick and you healed me. I was in prison and you freed me" but "I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you came to visit me". Do you see the comfort here? You don't have to become a missionary and move to the other side of the world to please God. Nor do you have to perform miracles to get Jesus'

attention. He is pleased when you simply get up off the couch to get your little sister a glass of water because she's thirsty. He's delighted when you change a diaper because the baby needs a dry bum. And he won't forget that you took the time to package those hand-me-downs to give to someone who needs them. In fact he will point to these things on Judgment Day and say that you did them for him! (Matthew 25:40)

What will our response be? It will be unpretentious. The sheep will answer: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?" (Matthew 25:37) Our response will be such because Christians don't keep track of the good things they've done, as if wracking up points for a pizza party in heaven.

This is how the goats are different. Because they did not have faith in Jesus as their savior they did not show love to God's people. If they did, like the time your unbelieving neighbor watched the kids while you had to attend a medical emergency, their motive was impure. They did it because they wanted you to think well of them or because they wanted you to do the same for them some day. They didn't do it to thank Jesus for all he had done for them.

But wait a minute. Don't Christians also do good things with impure motives? Sure. The prophet Isaiah said that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags in God's eyes. That's another reason the sheep's response to Jesus' words of commendation is unpretentious. They are well aware of how often they have failed to live up to God's standard of love for others. They know that they deserve Jesus' curse, not his blessing and so are humbled that Jesus would mention anything remotely good that they have done. The goats on the other hand are offended that Jesus does not acknowledge any of the "good" things they have done. It just goes to show that their faith is really in themselves and their own goodness. Their goodness, however, doesn't come close to matching the standard of perfection God expects.

Faith, Love, Unpretentiousness. Those are three things that distinguish the sheep from the goats but there is, however, one more thing that sets them apart: Fate. The sheep will enter into an eternal life of happiness with Jesus in heaven. Heaven is going to be an awesome place. I mean if the Garden of Eden was paradise and it only took God six days to make it, think of how much better heaven will be considering God has been working on it since Creation (Matthew 25:34)! I know of at least one way heaven will be better than the Garden of Eden; there will be no Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to trip us up. Our joy with Jesus will never be interrupted.

The goats on the other hand will go away to eternal judgment. How bad will that be? Well, consider this: God originally created hell for Satan and his evil angels. Hell must be some terrible place if a powerful spiritual being like Satan is going to be in anguish there forever. God of course doesn't want people to end up there with Satan but they will, not because they're pedophiles, drug dealers, or terrorists, but because they thumbed their nose at Jesus in this life saying: "I don't need you, Jesus. I'm really not that bad. I can stand before God on my own two feet." To God, that scornful rejection of his Son is as despicable as all the evil Satan has ever engineered and therefore deserving of the same punishment.

F.L.U.F. That's all that separates the sheep from the goats. It doesn't seem like much but it will make an eternal difference. So strengthen your God-given Faith through the study of his Word. Look to Jesus and not yourself for salvation and your Love for others will grow in acts of service. But remain Unpretentious about the good that you do knowing that it never measures up to God's perfect standard. Still, remain confident that your eternal Fate is never in doubt because your future depends on Jesus' righteousness. May Christ the King keep us as his sheep until he calls us home to enjoy the eternal pastures of heaven. Amen.