

The Mind of Christ

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our series of lessons on the mind of Christ, we now come to the last of six parables Jesus taught on the Tuesday, just days before His crucifixion.
 - A. Of those six parables:
 1. The first three parables were specifically directed at the immoral and corrupt religious leaders of Israel.
 2. But the second group of parables, all of which are recorded for us in Matthew chapter 25, were specifically directed at His disciples. In these three parables, Jesus answered their question about the Lord's coming and the end of time.
- II. The parable that Jesus taught in **Matthew 25:31-46** – The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats – has become so woven into our religious thought that it's become the very CENTER of Christian faith and practice.
 - A. To us, THIS parable lays down a principle of JUDGMENT that has become COMMONPLACE in our thinking.
 1. The New Testament is FILLED with references of a final judgment in which the RIGHTEOUS will be rewarded, and the WICKED and UNBELIEVING will be condemned.

- a. From the message at Pentecost to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and to save yourselves from this crooked generation. . .
 - b. To Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, in which he warns of a day when God will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ. . .
 - c. To the great judgment scene in John's revelation, where those whose names are not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...
 - d. The concept of a coming judgment of all mankind is woven throughout.
- B. But to the JEWISH disciples of Jesus who were hearing it for the first time, THIS message must have come as a great surprise because they had a DIFFERENT concept of the judgment. Although they BELIEVED in a final judgment, they believed there were only TWO STANDARDS by which all men will be judged.
1. The two standards are whether they were born a Jew (a fleshly descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and whether they kept all the ORDINANCES of the Law of Moses (that is, whether they made all the required sacrifices and performed all the rituals found in the Law).

- a. They believed being a Jew and a law-keeper would virtually guarantee them a home in heaven.
2. In **Philippians chapter three**, the apostle Paul even makes this argument regarding himself. In so many words, Paul argued that if he were to be judged SOLELY on the basis of THESE TWO criteria, he could have ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE of his standing before God. Why?
 - a. **Philippians 3:4-6** – *"If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."*
 - b. Paul said he MET those two standards of judgment – he was a Jew, and he was faithful to the Law (blameless).
 - c. But, Paul goes on to point out that his right standing before God is NOT based on these FLESHLY things, but rather on his FAITH in Jesus Christ.
3. However, Jesus presented His listeners with a completely DIFFERENT standard of judgment.

- a. In this parable, Jesus taught that the standard of judgment ALSO includes whether or not we responded to the needs of others.
 - b. To the Jewish disciples of Jesus, this was a REVOLUTIONARY teaching. It was UNPRECEDENTED!
 - c. Or WAS IT?
- C. The reason why Jews in the days of Jesus would have considered this teaching revolutionary and unprecedented is simply because they misunderstood the NATURE of the Law.
1. By the time Jesus came on the scene, the common man viewed the Law of Moses as nothing more than a system of rules and regulations.
 - a. They lost a sense the real NATURE and PURPOSE of the Law.
 - b. What they failed to see is that the Law was a PORTRAIT of God's CHARACTERISTICS, and of His RIGHTEOUS ATTRIBUTES.
 - c. It was a portrayal of His DIVINE CHARACTER – it REVEALED His DIVINE NATURE.
 2. Notice some Old Testament passages:
 - a. **Deuteronomy 10:12-13** – *"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your*

God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"

- (1). But what does it mean to *"walk in all His ways?"*
 - (2). The answer to that question comes by understanding God's character and attributes in His dealings with US.
 - (3). So, a few verses later we're given some examples of God's **RIGHTEOUS ATTRIBUTES**.
 - (4). **Deuteronomy 10:17-19** – *"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."*
 - (5). GOD is characterized by: showing no partiality, taking no bribes, being just, and being benevolent to the fatherless, widows and the stranger.
 - (6). And He expects US to be the **SAME WAY** to others.
- b. **Micah 6:6-8** – *" With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before*

Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

- (1). The people of Israel were PERVERTING the Law because they felt they could PAY for their sins by simply making enough SACRIFICES.
- (2). They believed they were justified by their WORKS, and **NOT** by their FAITH in God! They believed they could somehow EARN their way to heaven.
- (3). However, what was MORE important to the Lord – more important than ALL their sacrifices – and what the Lord actually REQUIRED was: *"to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (v. 8)*
- (4). Justice, mercy and humility (or modesty) are characteristics of GOD, and He wants US to MIRROR those divine attributes in our OWN lives.
- (5). If we REFUSE to exercise justice, mercy and humility (modesty), we become LAWBREAKERS – NOT

because we have broken some rules and regulations,
but because we have refused to mirror the DIVINE
CHARACTER of GOD in the way we TREAT OTHERS.

- c. **Hosea 4:1-6** – *"There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away. Now let no man contend, or rebuke another; for your people are like those who contend with the priest. Therefore you shall stumble in the day; the prophet also shall stumble with you in the night and I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."*

(1). What does it mean when the Lord said, *"My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge?"*

(2). We USUALLY think this means the people were destroyed because they no longer knew the Law of

Moses – that they were destroyed because they no longer knew Scripture, and therefore sinned.

- (3). But the Lord wasn't referring to THAT kind of knowledge at all. He was referring to the fact that the people no longer had any KNOWLEDGE of God's DIVINE CHARACTER, nor of His righteous ATTRIBUTES.
- (4). They didn't know the REAL ESSENCE of the LAW. They knew all the facts ABOUT God, but they had no knowledge OF, or appreciation FOR, the divine ATTRIBUTES and CHARACTER of God.
- (5). They had never INTERNALIZED the Law – they had never taken on the attributes and character of God in their OWN lives – there was no GODLINESS (God-LIKE-NESS).
- (6). As a result:
 - (a). They broke oaths – covenants.
 - (b). They killed, stole, committed adultery, lied, etc.
- (7). These are the things that happen when people know the RULES, but don't KNOW – or don't IMITATE or INTERNALIZE – the CHARACTER and ATTRIBUTES of the RULEMAKER!

3. Now, notice some of the teachings of Jesus:
 - a. **Matthew 7:12** – *"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."*
 - (1). Notice, Jesus said the TRUE ESSENCE of the Law and the Prophets is treating OTHERS the way WE want to be treated.
 - (2). Why is this the TRUE ESSENCE of the Law? Because it's the way God treats US – He treats US the way HE wants to be treated, therefore He wants us to treat OTHERS the same way.
 - b. When Jesus was asked by a young lawyer which was the greatest of all the commandments, the Lord replied: *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."* **(Matthew 22:37-40)**
 - (1). We not ONLY need to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and spirit, but we ALSO need to love OUR NEIGHBOR as OURSELVES.

(2). In doing THIS, Jesus said we will be FULFILLING the LAW and the PROPHETS – we will be fulfilling the TRUE ESSENCE of the Law.

c. In **Matthew 23**, speaking to the hypocritical Pharisees, Jesus said: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."* (**Matthew 23:23**)

(1). These Pharisees were SO BUSY keeping the part of the Law that addressed paying TITHES, they forgot the MORE WEIGHTY – the more IMPORTANT, and more SIGNIFICANT – aspects of the Law: showing JUSTICE, MERCY and FAITH (or FIDELITY – FAITHFULNESS).

(2). While paying tithes was important – things they SHOULD have done – they had failed to keep the REAL ESSENCE of the Law.

(3). They were so wrapped up in keeping the EXTERNAL aspects of the Law, they had failed to INTERNALIZE the true ESSENCE of the Law.

(4). And the true ESSENCE of the Law deals with the way we treat others – exercising justice, mercy and fidelity.

BODY:

I. Now that we understand something about the TRUE ESSENCE of the Law of God, let's see how Jesus applied this to the Lord's coming judgment at the end of time.

A. Let's begin by first looking at the Parable of the Sheep and Goats:

1. **Matthew 25:31-46** – *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My*

brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- B. In the parable of the Sheep and Goats, Jesus was attempting to show His disciples that the Judgment:
1. Will NOT ONLY be on the basis of:
 - a. How well we attended worship services...
 - b. How much we gave each week in the contribution...
 - c. How we observed the Lord's supper on the first day of the week...
 - d. Whether we tried to be doctrinally correct...
 2. But will ALSO be on the basis of:
 - a. How well we responded to the NEEDS OF OTHERS.

- (1). How many hungry did YOU feed?
 - (2). How many naked did YOU cloth?
 - (3). How many prisoners (those who were imprisoned and persecuted for righteousness sake) did YOU visit?
 - (4). How many sick did YOU care for?
3. Please DON'T MISUNDERSTAND what I'm saying.
- a. While all the things mentioned earlier are IMPORTANT – such as our attendance, our giving, our observing the Lord's supper, and our being doctrinally correct – they are important because they say something about our ATTITUDE toward the Word of God and our attitude toward the Lord's church.
 - b. But what is ALSO important – and perhaps of an even GREATER importance – is whether or not we have INTERNALIZED the CHARACTER and DIVINE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD in our own lives by the way we respond to the needs of others.
4. The parable of the Sheep and Goats is NOT asking how much you KNOW, or how doctrinally CORRECT you are. Rather, it's asking what KIND of PERSON are you?
- a. This parable is asking you to examine whether you've truly become GOD-LIKE and CHRIST-LIKE in your character.

- b. If you HAVE, you will receive eternal life. If you have NOT, you will receive everlasting punishment.
 - c. And THAT will be the basis of the coming judgment – it will not ONLY be a judgment based on your obedience to, and continued faithfulness to, the gospel of Christ, but ALSO on how well you INTERNALIZED the gospel of Christ in the way you treat others.
- II. The parable of the Sheep and Goats teaches FOUR valuable PRINCIPLES about helping others – about responding to the needs of others. And by understanding these principles, we can prepare ourselves for the coming judgment at the end of time – whenever that will be.
- A. PRINCIPLE ONE: It's not the BIG things we CAN'T do, it's the LITTLE things we CAN do.
- 1. How many times have you said, "What can I do for others? I can barely take care of myself!"
 - 2. When we begin looking at all the PRESSING NEEDS in our society, we might become discouraged at how LITTLE our efforts would really accomplish.
 - a. Most of us don't have the financial resources to make much of an impact on all the pressing needs around us.
 - b. And so, we feel helpless – overwhelmed.

4. But the kind of help Jesus is talking about is something EVERYONE can do.
 - a. **Matthew 10:42** – “. . . whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” (also Mark 9:41)
 - b. Jesus said just a SIMPLE ACT OF KINDNESS will ensure our reward.
 - c. How many times have you had the opportunity to simply show an ACT OF KINDNESS toward someone, and didn't?
 - d. Jesus is LOVING-KINDNESS PERSONIFIED, and He expects US to be the SAME WAY – even if it's giving something as seemingly insignificant as a cup of cold water.
 5. Just as Jesus taught in the Parable of the Talents – we don't need to be concerned with doing MORE than we're capable.
 6. We just need to make certain we're doing ALL we're capable of doing – giving 100 percent!
 7. And so, it's not the BIG things we CAN'T do, it's the LITTLE things we CAN do.
- B. PRINCIPLE TWO: It's not the PLANNED effort that has the greatest impact, it's the SPONTANEOUS act.

1. Did you notice something unique about the charitable acts of kindness done by the RIGHTEOUS?
 2. It seems these acts are done more as UNCONSCIOUS, SPONTANEOUS acts, rather than something they did because they were EXPECTED to do them.
 - a. Acts of kindness and responding to the needs of others came NATURALLY for these people – it was part of their EVERYDAY LIFESTYLE.
 - b. They were GIVING, NURTURING, CARING, COMPASSIONATE, and SELF-SACRIFICING people.
 - c. When they saw a NEED, they ACTED! They didn't wait for someone ELSE to act – THEY responded as soon as they saw a need.
 3. And so, it's not the PLANNED effort that has the greatest impact, it's the SPONTANEOUS act.
- C. PRINCIPLE THREE: It's not for OUR SAKES that we do good but rather for the sake of OTHERS.
1. Those who gave were NOT trying to draw attention to themselves – it was NOT something they did to win the approval or praise of others.
 2. Their WHOLE PURPOSE for giving and responding to the needs of others was simply because someone had a need.

3. Sadly, some are willing to do good ONLY if THEY get something out of it.
 - a. They want some kind of RECOGNITION – some CREDIT for having performed an act of service. And if no one will ever find out about their act of kindness or generosity, their good deed will probably never be done.
 - b. Or, they're hoping that by DOING good for someone, it will guarantee a reward in heaven for THEM.
 - (1). And so, they GRIMLY COMPEL themselves to do good.
 - (2). It's not something they WANT to do, but something they feel they HAVE to do to go to heaven.
 4. And so, it's not for OUR SAKES that we do good, but rather for the sake of OTHERS.
- D. PRINCIPLE FOUR: It's not seeing WHO is in need, but rather seeing the NEED itself.
1. Almost EVERYONE would be happy and eager to help some IMPORTANT or INFLUENTIAL person.
 2. But how often do we pass by those who are just COMMON, ORDINARY people?
 3. Are we willing to help those who LOOK LIKE it might do them some good, and look PAST those who look like NOTHING could ever help them?

4. Isn't that being PREJUDICE? Isn't that JUDGING on the basis of SUPERFICIAL CIRCUMSTANCES – without EVER getting to know the REAL person?
 - a. That's RESPECT of PERSONS! The very thing God is NOT! He is NOT a respecter of persons!
 - b. So, how can WE be GOD-LIKE in our character and attributes if WE show partiality based on a persons ethnicity, social standing, or economic condition?
 - c. Beside, we don't REALLY KNOW WHY that person is homeless, or WHY someone else is down and depressed, or WHY another has become discouraged and simply QUIT coming to worship services.
 - d. We don't KNOW until we KNOW THEM.
5. And so, it's not seeing WHO is in need, but rather seeing WHAT the need IS.

III. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, Jesus summarized His teaching with this sentence: ". . . *inasmuch as you did it to one of the LEAST of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*" **(Matthew 25:40)**

- A. In previous lessons in this series on The Mind of Christ, we learned that Jesus taught God is our "FATHER" in two ways:

1. First, in the special relationship WE have with Him IN CHRIST – by being part of the spiritual family of God through our obedience to the gospel of Christ .
2. And second, God is our Father in the sense that He is the "CREATOR" of all mankind. In that sense ALL MEN are sons of God.
3. We all know that if you want to do something to really please a parent then do something for one of their kids.
4. God, our FATHER, is no different. If you want to please God, then do something for one of HIS kids.
 - a. I realize that in ONE sense there isn't ANYTHING we can do FOR God, nor is there anything we can GIVE Him that He NEEDS. God has EVERYTHING ALREADY!
 - b. But you and I CAN do things for His sons and daughters – those who are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, and those who are children of God by creation.
 - c. And Jesus said, when we do these things – feed the hungry, clothe the naked, respond to the needs of those who are imprisoned, and care for the sick – and we do it for those whom we might think are the LEAST IMPORTANT among us, we do it for GOD.

CONCLUSION:

- I. What do YOU do when you see a need?
 - A. Do you respond to that need out of COMPASSION, or do you simply turn the other way.
 1. **Hebrews 13:2** – *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.*
 2. The word, “entertain” means to show hospitality toward or to lovingly respond to the need of – and in this case, it’s “strangers.”
 3. I realize angels – like the ones Abraham entertained – were theophanies: manifestations of God in other forms and were probably ONLY during Biblical times. But I STILL wonder if PERHAPS we encounter them today.
 4. Let me ask: How many “ANGELS” have you entertained?
 5. Or maybe I should ask the question this way: How many “ANGELS” have you neglected to show ANY act of loving-kindness.
 - B. Years ago I wrote a short story about one of the most touching events in my life – a lesson that was taught to me by my youngest daughter, Kathi, who was only 10-years old at the time. The title of that short story was “Entertaining Angels.”

1. The story was about a particular Sunday evening, when I was leaving Yuma, Arizona, where I had preached that weekend, and was preparing to make the three-hour drive back to San Diego.
2. That Sunday, my daughter Kathi had gone with me, and before we started for home, we pulled into a McDonalds next to the freeway.
 - a. As we entered the parking lot, Kathi saw a homeless woman with her small dog standing all by herself with one of those all-to-familiar signs: “Hungry. Will work for food.”
 - b. I had been keeping a ten dollar bill I had given Kathi for her birthday so she wouldn’t lose it. And when it came time to place our order, Kathi asked me if she could spend some of her birthday money to buy that lady some food.
 - c. Of course, my first reaction was to keep my daughter from throwing away her money by giving it to some homeless person who probably WOULDN’T work for food even if she was OFFERED a job.
 - d. But then, everything I had ever taught about compassion, mercy and “doing unto others as we would have them do unto us” came flooding into my mind.
 - e. And so, I agreed. I bought OUR food with my money, but let Kathi spend HER money on buying a large Coke, a quarter-pounder with cheese and large fries for the lady with the sign.

- e. I can still see the whole scene: Kathi walking across the dusty field in her pink “church dress” and shiny black shoes and handing a very grateful woman her meal for the evening.
 - f. As Kathi returned to the car, I still remember the woman slowly climbing the nearby hill, occasionally glancing back with a warm smile, as she approached the big City of Yuma water tank where she would probably spend the night sleeping on the ground.
3. This is where I want to pick up the rest of the story I wrote: *I once read a story about the Roman soldier-saint, Martin of Turin. The legend says that Martin was entering a small, desolate village one frigid winter day, when he noticed a beggar. The man was nearly blue from the cold, and frail. He was begging for money. Martin told the poor beggar that he didn't have any money. But to prevent the old man from freezing to death, Martin took off his battered Roman soldier's cloak and ripped it in two, giving half to the beggar. The poor old man thanked Martin and quickly disappeared around a corner. Later that same night, the legend says, Martin had a dream in which he saw heaven and all the glory of heavenly beings around the throne of Christ. One of the angels there was seen wearing half of an old worn Roman*

soldier's cloak. Then Jesus asked, "My son, where did you get that?" The angel replied, "Your servant Martin gave it to me!"

Since that night in Yuma, I've often wondered. I've wondered if later than same night an angel might have been seen walking through the streets of heaven, carrying a McDonalds bag containing a quarter-pounder with cheese and a large fry in one hand, and a large Coke in the other. And I've wondered if perhaps that angel might have been stopped by Jesus who asked, "My child, where did you get that?" Only to have the angel reply, "Your servant Kathi gave it to me!"

4. Maybe THIS is what Jesus meant when He said: *"unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

(Matthew 18:3-4)

II. How will the Lord see you on judgment day?

- A. Will He see you as one who has spent a lifetime doing all you could to respond to the needs of others, or will He see you as someone who is selfish, self-centered, and who has become insensitive to the needs of others?

1. God saw YOUR need and responded.
 - a. He saw YOUR need for the forgiveness of your sins, and gave His only begotten Son to meet that need.
 2. And Jesus saw YOUR need and responded by shedding His blood on the cross for YOU.
 3. So, what are YOU doing to respond to the needs of others?
- B. A faithful child of God has no problem seeing and responding to the needs of others because that's what faithful Christians do.
1. But maybe that's the problem:
 - a. Perhaps, you're NOT a Christian – one who has been baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and added by the Lord to His church.
 - b. Or perhaps the problem is that you're no LONGER a faithful Christian – and you need to come back to the Lord.
 2. If either of these situations describe YOU then you need to do something about it right now!
 3. How sad it would be to spend a lifetime of GIVING to OTHERS, and yet NEVER ONCE caring about what God and Jesus Christ gave YOU.