Pastor Richard Allen Farmer

The Crossroads Church

5587 Redan Rd.

Stone Mountain, GA 30088

Series- Putting Feet to Faith:

Becoming a Matthew 25 Church

Part 1- “Sheep and Goats: Needed Distinctions”

Matthew 25:31-33

We had seemingly endless discussions during my collegiate years, about the social gospel versus the biblical gospel. In short, there were those who believed that our ministry should be focused on proclaiming the story of Jesus and then giving people an opportunity to receive Jesus, so that they would be saved. Others said a hungry person cannot concentrate enough to even *hear* the gospel, over the loud rumbling of their stomachs. This other group said that our ministry should focus on feeding the hungry and addressing social ills. In this text Jesus addresses this same dichotomy. He notes two kinds of people: those who are sensitive *to* and act on the needs *of* the marginalized; the disenfranchised; the least; the lost- and those who do not.

In current cultural dialogue, it is fashionable to eradicate distinctions.

* “We are all the same”
* “There is only one God, right?”
* “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere”
* “There’s only one race: the human race”
* “I don’t see color. I just see people”

Jesus does not subscribe to that line of reasoning. Jesus draws a distinction, in this passage, between *kinds* of people. Some are sheep. Some are goats. Some are compliant. Some are non-compliant. New Testament scholar R.T. France, in his commentary on the gospel of Matthew, says that division has been a key theme in this gospel since 24:38, which reads

*For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark...*

In chapter 13 of Matthew there is a set of parables, all of which present the clear teaching that we are **not** all the same. A sower went to sow and the seed which was sowed fell onto different kinds of soil (13:3-8). In the parable that follows that one, a sower sows good seed in his field and while he sleeps his enemy comes and sows tares. The wheat and the tares grow together until harvest...then there is separation (13:24-30). Distinction. Division. Particularity. Did you hear it? There is a stark contrast between this teaching of Jesus and our national discourse.

I want to begin this thinking about how we can become a Matthew 25 church by first reminding us that the Church is a distinctive organism, with a distinct mission and mandate. Our Lord spoke to His followers and said, “Go...and make disciples of all the nations”. Clearly, the Church has something different to say, to sing, to teach, to preach, to offer (Matthew 28:19). We are NOT like everybody else.

There are sheep and goats.

There are obedient disciples and disobedient disciples.

There are holy and unholy people.

There are people on the right and people on the left (In this passage, the right hand is the hand of favor/good; the left is disfavor/bad.)

There IS a distinction...at least there *ought* to be!!!

**Illus.**

In a blog post titled, We’ve Got to Stop Lumping All Asian-Americans Together, Vallay Varro wrote about the frustration she feels, as a Hmong (an ethnic group that has never had a country of their own) woman who is seen as simply “Asian”. She writes,

*“I was seen as the Asian girl first and foremost—assumed to be great at math and science, high-performing and musically inclined. But those stereotypes didn’t describe me.”*

Later in the post she wrote,

*We are seen as one big subgroup—Asian—and little to no differentiation is given beyond that. This invisibility of being lumped into the “model minority” myth hurts newer AAPI* (Asian American Pacific Islander) *students particularly and perpetuates the inability of schools to meet individual educational needs.*

We do not simply have Asians in the world. N0, we have **distinctions**. Particularity. We have Koreans and Chinese and Japanese and Thai and Filipinos. There are **distinctions** in ethnicities- and in theology. Our text says Jesus will separate people one from another.

Caution: This passage does not affirm the belief that good deeds, by themselves, guarantee salvation. We are not and never were, saved by our good works. Old Testament righteous people were saved by faith (Hebrews 11:1-13). In the New Testament era, the same is true (Ephesians 2:8-10). Believers are to do good works, but we do good *because* we are saved, not in order to *get* saved (Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 6:10; Hebrews 13:16). I understand how one could read this passage, connect it, perhaps, with Matthew 22:34-40 and conclude that one’s deeds of kindness, mercy, compassion and material generosity would qualify one for entrance into God’s kingdom. Serving the less fortunate is what we are expected to do.

Isaiah 58:7

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?*

Note the states of need in our text in Matthew 25:

* Hungry, needing food
* Thirsty, needing drink
* Stranger, needing taking in (Tyndale’s version of the New Testament: *I was harbourless and ye lodged me.*
* Naked, needing clothing
* Sick, needing visitation (*visit* has the Latin *viso* (look upon; observe; look after) as its root. To visit is to *look upon* another.
* In prison, needing visitation

Addressing these needs is not done with a “let me show God I’m a good person” attitude. Rather, we address the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the naked, the sick and incarcerated from a distinctly theological vantage point. We celebrate our distinction. We are not only God’s *people*. We are God’s *sheep*. We are God’s right-hand people. That posture is the point from which we do our best work.

We do not simply serve the needy. We serve them in the name of Jesus! That’s the difference.

There are many organizations that feed the hungry:

* Feeding America
* Meals on Wheels
* Action Against Hunger
* The Hunger Project

There are organizations that provide water:

* [water.org](http://water.org)
* WaterAid
* WATERisLIFE
* Pure Water for The World

Around the world there are hundreds of organizations that are committed to humanitarian relief.

* Oxfam International
* World Vision
* The Red Cross
* International Rescue Committee
* World Jewish Relief

Good organizations, doing needed work in the world.

Q: How do we differ from them?

A: We remember that we are sheep. We do all we can to maintain our distinction. In fact, we highlight the distinction. We put our faith into our actions and put action to our faith. We serve from a unique perspective. We, the sheep, represent the Shepherd, in our deeds and our words.

**Illus.**

Some years ago, I was at a gas station and a car was at a pump next to mine. It appeared that the woman driving the car was living in it. Clothes and other personal effects were easily visible through the windows. She was asking for money to put some gas in her car. I told her, “If Jesus were here, He would buy you some gas. I represent Jesus”. I bought her some gas, with a high sense of privilege. We get to represent Jesus in our work, our ministries, our daily actions and decisions.

We are God’s sheep!

Vs. 33

*And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.*

Psalm 100:3c

*We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

Amen