



MORE THAN WORDS: THE TEST OF TRUE FAITH

Sermon

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The theme of this sermon is that our faith should not be merely spoken but must manifest as acts of love in action. In the conclusion, there is an appeal for the congregation to participate in visiting neighbors, patients, and those in need—as planned by the Women's Ministry and the Community Service Department—in the afternoon, to put the sermon's lessons into practice. If the visit has not been arranged, please modify the conclusion accordingly.

I. Introduction:

Did you enjoy today's children's sermon about Grandpa Moses' bakery? This story is a modern adaptation of the parable of the sheep and the goats from Matthew 25, which serves as today's main scripture passage. Based on this text, I will be sharing today's message under the title **"More Than Words: The Test of True Faith."**

Let us begin by reading God's word together.

In Matthew 25:43-45 we read, " '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.' "

In this story, those described as sheep are commended by the King, that is, God. The King says, "You gave me food when I was hungry, you visited me when I was imprisoned, you clothed me when I was naked." But those hearing this story have no recollection of such acts, asking when they did any of those things for Him. Then the King responds, saying that the acts done for the least of these were acts done for Him. Following the same logic, the King condemns those represented as goats, stating that their failure to help others was essentially the same as doing nothing for Him, and it was this indifference that led to their judgment.

II. Main Body:

A. Context of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats

Understanding the placement of this parable within the broader context of Scripture is essential. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 is a direct response to the disciples' question in Matthew 24:3: "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' "

Jesus answers this question throughout chapters 24 and 25. However, when it comes to the specific timing of His return, He makes it clear: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Rather than focusing on the "when" of His return, Jesus shifts His emphasis to the "how"—how His followers should prepare. He illustrates this through three parables in chapter 25: the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Parable of the Talents, and the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. Each parable provides a lesson on how Christians should live as they await His return.

- The Parable of the Ten Virgins teaches the importance of being spiritually prepared by having the oil of the Holy Spirit.
- The Parable of the Talents emphasizes using our God-given resources—time, talents, and finances—for His glory.
- The Parable of the Sheep and Goats is a call to action, urging us to extend love and compassion to those in need.

With this context in mind, let us reflect on the message of the sheep and goats. Jesus' final instruction to those eagerly awaiting His return is simple yet profound: serve those in need as if serving Him. This message is not merely an encouragement but a warning.

B. The Identity of the Goats

In Matthew 25:41 we read, "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.' "

It is crucial to note that Jesus is addressing believers—those who claim to follow Him. His warning is directed at those who know Scripture, understand His teachings, and claim to await His return. Yet, if their faith does not translate into action, they stand condemned. Though we are saved by faith, our actions will be the measure by which we are judged. True faith is always evidenced by love in action. If we remain indifferent to the needs of others, it reveals a lack of genuine faith and righteousness.

C. The Evidence of True Faith

This teaching echoes the words of John in 1 John 3:10, 17, 18: "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. . . . But whoever

has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

James reinforces this principle in James 2:14-17: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

These passages teach that our true faith is revealed in how we treat those in need. Faith and love are inseparable. A person who claims to follow Christ yet lacks acts of love and mercy is living in contradiction.

Each of us must examine our own hearts: Are we actively helping those in need? Will we be counted among the sheep who are commended, or among the goats who are condemned?

Though salvation comes by faith, those who lack love in action will face judgment. This warning is especially relevant to those who pride themselves on religious observance while neglecting compassion. The Pharisees of Jesus’ time exemplified this hypocrisy.

D. The Pharisees' Prayer

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess’ “ (Luke 18:11, 12).

His prayer was filled with self-righteousness, focused on his own works and condemning others. He separated himself from those he deemed sinners and prided himself in his own goodness. However, it should be noted that he never made any effort to help those he condemned. He did not ask how he could assist the poor sinner, instead treating them as people who could be left to perish in their indifference. Jesus provides another example in the story of the rich young ruler:

E. The Story of the Rich Young Ruler

“And he said, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’ So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich” (Luke 18:21-23).

Like many Pharisees, this man prided himself on keeping the law. The Jews had 613 commandments they sought to obey, but Jesus distilled the matter down to the essential: love for others. The rich ruler claimed to follow the commandments, but his unwillingness to help the poor revealed a lack of true faith.

Some argue that Jesus' words imply salvation through works, but the true lesson is the opposite: No one can perfectly keep the law. Salvation is only possible through

faith in Christ. However, that faith must manifest in acts of love and service. If we say we believe in Christ but ignore the needs of others, our faith is empty. True believers reflect Jesus' love through their actions. The question we must ask ourselves is this: Are we truly living as His disciples, serving others as if serving Christ Himself? Or are we living in self-righteous complacency, neglecting those in need?

The day of judgment will reveal the answer. Let us strive to be counted among the sheep, faithfully demonstrating Christ's love in all we do.

F. The Modern Rich Young Ruler

Pastor George R. Knight provided an insightful explanation of this passage in his book, *I Used to be Perfect*. Let me illustrate his point in a simple way: Imagine that there is a poor single mother (a widow) with many children living next to me. I have not murdered her. I have not committed adultery with her because I do not feel any attraction to her. I have not stolen from her, since she has nothing to steal. I have not lied to her, as I rarely speak with her. I have not coveted anything of hers, as she owns little.

In other words, I have done nothing for this poor neighbor, and yet, by doing nothing, I could claim that I have kept all the commandments.

This is exactly what the rich ruler was saying to Jesus: *I have kept all the laws since my youth*. And unfortunately, this is the same attitude that many Seventh-day Adventists in the last days will have.

On the outside, they appear to keep the law. Unlike many other Christians, they observe the holy Sabbath. They faithfully attend prayer meetings. They pay tithe, give regular offerings, donate investment funds, and contribute to Sabbath School collections. Yet, by being indifferent to those in need—the least of these—they will ultimately reveal that they lack true love, that they do not have faith in Jesus, and that they are devoid of the Holy Spirit.

Their indifference will be evidence against them, and they will hear the dreadful judgment: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:23).

No matter how much we verbally claim to believe in Jesus, our actions of love will be the true test of whether our faith is genuine or not.

Today, we are holding a “Visitor's Day. Friends of Hope Sabbath.” Let us reflect: how many neighbors have we brought to Jesus? If we have never brought even one neighbor to church or invited anyone, could it be because we have lived with indifference toward our neighbors and the least of these? Could it be because we, like the rich ruler, have been living a hypocritical Christian life? Could it be that we belong to the goats rather than the sheep?

G. Saving others, saving yourself.

The Bible teaches that people compared to sheep receive praise from God and are saved because of their help toward others. A real-life example of this is Tabitha, mentioned in the book of Acts. The Bible speaks of her in Acts 9:36:

“At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.”

When she died, the widows who had received much help from her mourned her passing and showed Peter the garments she had made for them. Peter, sensing the great loss her death was to the church, prayed to God for her to be restored to life. Miraculously, Tabitha opened her eyes and was revived.

During her life, Tabitha dedicated herself to helping those in need, particularly the widows, and showing them love. It was her acts of kindness toward others that ultimately led to her being helped. Though Tabitha passed away in this world again, we believe that on the day of Christ’s return, she will rise in the resurrection of the righteous and receive eternal life.

In this way, helping others can, in turn, bring life to ourselves. As explained earlier, this does not mean that simply doing good deeds leads to salvation. Rather, the practice of love demonstrates whether you truly have the love of Christ and faith in Christ.

III. **Conclusion:**

The Jews treasured the temple in Jerusalem and believed that simply having the temple meant they were saved as descendants of Abraham. But they had no concern for the salvation of others. At most, they built an outer courtyard for the Gentiles at the far end of the temple, essentially saying, *If you want to come, come.*

If we think that simply keeping the Sabbath—a holy sign of God’s people—guarantees our salvation, yet we remain indifferent to the needs of our neighbors, and if we believe that people should read the Bible on their own and come to our church by themselves, then I am convinced that we are among the goats.

However, the conclusion of the parable is not yet finished. There is still an opportunity for us to move from the goat’s group to the sheep’s flock. This afternoon, under the guidance of the Women’s Ministry and the Community Service departments, we will visit those in need. We will continue doing this regularly. Through these efforts, we will prove our faith and fulfill the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

We can no longer sit idly by, merely inviting others to come. We must go to the highways and hedges. Jesus’ final command on earth also begins with “Therefore go” (Matthew 28:19). We must have a faith that moves toward those in need.

I earnestly hope that all of us will embrace the heart and love of Jesus. May we actively seek out those in need and share our love and devotion with them as if we were serving Jesus Himself.

This is my sincere prayer as I conclude today’s message. Amen.