

*"When the son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne... Before him will be gathered all the people -- and he will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left... and they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life..."*

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This is not as simple as it sounds...

In my mind's eye I can see myself standing there, when the Son of Man comes in his glory and being asked to make a case for myself... Perhaps he'll look at me and say, "Well, where do you think you belong?"

Perhaps I'd answer, "Lord, sometimes, I fed the hungry, and there were days that I visited the hospital and the jails and the nursing homes, and many times, I clothed the naked -- well they weren't really naked, but they did need the clothes I gave them..."

And perhaps the King would answer, "That's pretty sheepish of you..."

"But Lord, that's not all, I'd say, "You know there were days I stuffed myself when others starved -- nights I sat in my warm house while others of your children slept in refrigerator boxes next to dumpsters -- Times that I spent the time and the resources you gave me on my own amusement rather in your service -- You know that too..."

And maybe he'd say, "That sounds pretty goaty to me..."

Not so simple.

If judgment day is like what Matthew writes about, we're all in for a bit of trouble, because none of us are either 100% sheep or 100% goat; we're a mixture.

There is such an animal, you know...

I read about it in the dentist's office, in one of those magazines you read while you're waiting to get your teeth cleaned. It was an article about how genetic researchers had succeeded in producing the hybrid of a sheep and a goat. They called it a "geep." It was a fairly nondescript creature -- seemed to combine the worst features of both animals, if you can imagine that... But that's what we are, Geeps (or is it geep??); fit neither for the right hand or the left hand of God...

Part saints and part sinners -- a mixed breed of sheep and goat.

There is within me, and within you, two selves so intertwined, that they're inseparable -- and how will God deal with us on judgment day?

Within me is a self that is capable of cruelty beyond my admitting, but within me also is a loving person capable of acts of compassion that surprise me... There is inside me an indifferent self willing to let the rest of the world go hang, so long as me and my family are taken care of, but living right alongside that wretch is somebody that is involved in the struggle to make this world a better place, and as it is with me, so it is with you...

You see God's problem on Judgment day? We are a jigsaw puzzle of holy and unholy motives -- a hodgepodge of selfish and unselfish deeds. What will the Lord do with such half breeds - Geep - like us on Judgment day when he separates the sheep from the goats? Will it be greener pastures of slaughter?

Well, let me tell you what I think. I think it'll be both. Both.

It's likely that you and I will go through hell that day. The shepherd loves his sheep so much and has wept throughout the ages over the ones who have starved or froze or lay sick with nobody to care. The king of kings on that day will show them to us and say through his tears, "Those were my children." And all the regret and pain God has felt throughout all the ages will be ours... And that will be hell.

I think there will be hell for us to pay on that judgment day, seeing and touching and hearing, as in a passing parade, all those who we should have helped and didn't because we decided it just wasn't wise -- just wasn't in our best interest -- just wasn't practical or plain just wasn't worth it. You and I will have to answer for that, and know down deep that we were far more goat than sheep. I do not look forward to that day, not one little bit.

But I think this too: After the hell that is paid, to the God we have grieved there will come a word -- a quiet and grace-full word that we scarcely deserve. This incredible king of kings will look at you and me and say, *"I tell you the truth, you who had full cupboards are the truly hungry; I will feed you. You who dressed so well are the truly naked; I will clothe you. You who enjoyed such lavish access to all the good things in the world -- you are the truly imprisoned; I will set you free.*

And miracle upon miracle, he will set us on our feet and give us back our very lives. That is what it means to be judged on the basis of our deeds, but sentenced on the basis of grace. That's what I think might happen to half-breeds like us on judgment day.

In fact, that's what happens every day when we confess our sins. If we take our confession seriously, God will count out in front of us the change we put into the plate and call an offering. God will remind us of the time we changed the TV channel rather than face the news of yet somebody else homeless or starving. God will show us the faces of the future generations who will have less because of our robbery of the earth's resources... If we take our confession seriously, God will give us hell... But that's the only way God has of giving us back our lives.

Because only then will the good news sound really good, when the king of kings and Lord of lords, says, "I love you still. Now go and do what you did not do yesterday ... for I was hungry, jailed, and a stranger..."

Amen