

## The Greatest Separation of All Time

“If I’m lying, I’m dying!” That’s a common phrase where I grew up. It is used when a person is about to relate a story which is true but is so far-fetched that that it’s going to a bit hard for others to believe. So here we go....

It was a warm summer Sunday evening worship service where I was the preacher in a small, rural town in southwest Colorado. It was fairly common to have deer on the church property and would often be a distraction as they wandered into view of the congregation. The first time it happened, so many were staring out the side door that I left the pulpit to take a gander myself.

But this particular evening I was preaching from Matthew 25, the chapter wherein Jesus tells of judgement day when God would separate the sheep (the saved) and the goats (the lost). About halfway through the lesson a goat, a full grown, literal four-legged brown goat walked up to the main door at the back and stuck his head inside the propped open double doors.

I’m pretty sure I paused just a bit too long, then said “There’s a goat at the front door!” Considering the passage under consideration, a mild giggle passed through the church. “No, I mean a real goat... at the front door.” Now a hearty giggle gurgled up from the church family. I should have expected that because I’m known for pulling pranks like that. “Y’all look, it’s a real goat. ZERO people turned around to look, but several rolled their eyes, thinking some version of, “What’s the wacky preacher guy doing now?”

Finally, I called on a deacon who was sitting on the middle aisle, “Joe, would you please turn around, look up the aisle and tell everyone what you see?” Joe smiled, figuring he was about to be the object of some joke, but he did look. He turned back with wide eyes and said, “Well, there is a real goat at the front door.” At this point a *lot* of people turned to look for themselves. Yes, I pretty much lost the attention of the whole crowd! After the giggling stopped the goat dutifully followed the Matthew 25:33 and exited to the left! Yes, really! (An image of that goat is now on our electronic picture frame that cycles through several hundred family photos. It can be seen exiting to the left.)

What’s the point? Today, many people have a hard time believing that Jesus is actually going to come back and separate the saved from the unsaved (see Matthew 25:31-33.) Today, Jesus invites us to picture the scene as we read, just as in person then. Christians sort of know, sort of remember, but little time is spent seeing the view in the mind’s eye. Like the people of Ezekiel 12:21-26, many today doubt that Jesus will come back anytime soon.

That approach to Jesus’ words has led the last several generations to ignore that passage or deny its reality. We should train ourselves to look for daily reminders of important scriptures that must be remembered if we are to be prepared.

Of course, sometimes, even when we aren’t looking for those reminders, God sends little events like a real live goat, when some preacher is speaking on Matthew 25!

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