

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-08-26—GOATS IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

True life is one *without* death. Obviously, that is eternal life. So, this physical life is more of an *existence* because life that ends with death is not really life, is it? So what is the purpose of this physical existence? I believe there are two main reasons (for those in covenant with God). The first is to be perfected in agape love; that is, to be made like God IS—into agape love.

The second reason for this physical existence is to prove to God—and ourselves—whether or not we are growing in and becoming agape love. In my estimation, this almost always involves some form of suffering whether it is illness, disease, pain, poverty, persecution, etc. It should not come as a surprise to anyone that the begotten children of God must suffer in this life<sup>1</sup>:

PHILIPPIANS 1:29 For **unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ**, not only to believe on Him, but also **to suffer for His sake**;

Those who suffer are being perfected in love, faith, and hope. But there is another side of suffering that reaches beyond the person who is afflicted. I am speaking of those who know of others who are suffering. In that lies opportunities to do good works, as it says:

2 TIMOTHY 3:17 That the man [*or woman*] of God may be perfect, throughly **furnished [equipped] unto [for the purpose of doing] all good works**.

EPHESIANS 2:10 For we are His [*God the Father's*] workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus unto [for the purpose of doing] good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Many messages have been given on the various townships of the *eklesia* in Revelation 2-3, but I have not heard one that recognizes what Jesus Christ said to those who lived in Thyatira:

REVELATION 2:18-19 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write ... 19 I [*Jesus Christ*] know **thy works, and charity, and service**, and faith, and thy patience, **and thy works**; and the last *are* more than the first.

What are their works? Charity (love) and service to others, especially for brethren. Something else that no one mentions is the fact that this was great PRAISE from Jesus Christ to those in Thyatira. Obviously, not all were followers of Jezebel (Rev. 2:20-23):

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<sup>1</sup> Also 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:16-17; 1 Pet. 5:10.

REVELATION 2:24 But to you I say, and **to the rest who are in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan,** as they speak; **I will not cast upon you any other burden,**

Actually, I believe that the *ekklesia* in Thyatira were more highly praised by Jesus Christ than all the others, including those of Philadelphia whom many believe were the ‘best’ of all the townships. Why? While Jesus acknowledged that the Philadelphians had a “little strength” (Rev. 3:8) and “kept the word of My patience” (Rev. 3:10), those are basic expectations. Jesus said, “when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.’” (Luke 17:10). Those in Thyatira likewise had “patience” but, unlike the Philadelphians, the Thyatirans were praised for faith AND having **good works of love and service** to the brethren! Above all, Jesus said their last works were even *greater* than the first. Why such praise? Because good works are a reflection of God’s agape love IN a person. Love and good works are pleasing to God above all else. I have written and spoken many times about good works. They ARE salvational, as confirmed in the parable of the sheep and goats:

MATTHEW 25:31-46 When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: 32 And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: 33 And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, **Come, ye [the sheep—those who do good works] blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:** 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed *Thee*? or thirsty, and gave *Thee* drink? 38 When saw we Thee a stranger, and took *Thee* in? or naked, and clothed *Thee*? 39 Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch **as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.**

Doing good works for those who suffer or are in need are a test of the heart—of agape love living and working in a person. Right now, at this very moment, there are a number of brethren who suffer. So here is my concern: many of them are alone and unattended. Among all of those who claim to be children of God, why would that ever be the case?!?

Much of the time it seems the excuse is that those in need are not a member of a certain organized ‘church!’ This is not unheard of and I suspect that every one of you know that this sort of rejection goes on. You have seen and likely experienced it. However, that does not answer the question of WHY this occurs. Could it be that the *ekklesia* have come to rely upon organizations to do the good works for them? Are good works the

responsibility of the ‘headquarters’ of a COG of which they are a ‘member’? Who believes that sending money (‘tithes’) to an organization fulfills the responsibilities WE have for one another? If any of these are true, then there is a problem—a really BIG problem. No one who sends money to an organization and thinks that satisfies their own good works for brethren in which they have the means and opportunity to help will be in the Kingdom! Those who doubt this must read:

MATTHEW 25:41-46 Then shall **he [Jesus Christ] say also unto them on the left hand [the goats, those who do NO good works], Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire**, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? 45 Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to Me. 46 And **these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.**

Most needs are *not* about money nor can they be solved with money. In fact, the parable of the sheep and goats does not even MENTION money. It describes those who need food or drink; those who are isolated and need a friend; those who need clothes; those who are sick or ill and need help; and those are lonely and need encouragement (in prison). Refusing to help others as we have means and opportunity reflects an utter LACK of agape love, and that is the definition of a “goat.”

One lady lives within fifteen minutes from brethren who completely ignore her. Some are isolated and confined to their home without any help although brethren live nearby (even if only an hour or two away). Obviously, there are circumstances where it is not possible to be involved, but, remember, I am referring to those who HAVE the means and opportunity. How serious does the suffering or affliction have to be before someone steps in? Those things mentioned in the parable of the sheep and goats are SIMPLE but necessary. Many times, they are no more difficult than providing a ride to a Sabbath meeting or the grocery store, taking time to visit with the lonely, calling or writing a card of encouragement, visiting someone in the hospital, or helping with home repairs.

Is their excuse to avoid good works that someone is not a ‘member’ of the same organization? What does it take for someone to have enough agape love to help a brother or sister even if they are a “stranger” to them? Paul said, “**by love serve** one another” (Gal. 5:13). The *ekklesia* of God should not be divided by ANYTHING! Certainly not by a man-made organization. Paul also said in Ephesians 4:2-6 that we SUFFER (the meaning of the Greek word for *forebear*) **with one another** in love because there is only ONE body, ONE spirit, ONE hope, ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism, and ONE God the Father of all of us. In fact, “all *men* know that ye are My [Jesus Christ’s] disciples, **if**

**ye have love one to another.**” (John 13:35). We are to be ONE WITH EACH OTHER<sup>2</sup>! To what end?

EPHESIANS 4:16 **From whom [Jesus Christ]** the whole body fitly joined together and compacted **by that which every joint [that is you and me]** **supplieth**, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, **maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.**

What does that mean? It means that Jesus supplies those things TO the children of God so that they have the means and opportunities to do good works that build one up another in agape love! Who withholds those things they have been blessed to do from those in need? Who is blessed with time to talk? Who is a handyman (or woman)? Who can provide transportation? Who has gifts to encourage, or provide wisdom or console those who are hurting? Many of the *ekklesia* act like the current generations who ‘socialize’ solely through a cell phone. Too many will only pray for those who suffer because they do not want to actually take the time to engage with them. Prayer is NOT all that God expects of us if, as Paul said in Ephesians 4:16, Jesus Christ supplies us with the means and opportunity to do good works. James clearly backs this up:

JAMES 2:14-17 What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and **have not works**? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding **ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?** 17 Even so **faith, if it hath not works, is dead**, being alone.

Let me be blunt. James, along with the parable of the goats, etc., tells us that unless we do good works (I will say it again—AS Jesus Christ provides the means and opportunity), THERE...IS...NO...SALVATION! Our Father wants loving SHEEP, not a people who have no love for their fellow brethren. The latter are behaving simply as goats in sheep’s clothing! He wants children whose heart, mind, and soul—their very being—ARE agape love and PROVE it through good works to one another. May we, brethren, be worthy of the praise of Jesus Christ, like He gave to those in Thyatira, because OUR last good works were more—MUCH more—than the first!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>2</sup> John 17:21-24.