

# The Sheep and the Goats

## What do Christians believe about 'eschatology'?

### To do...

 As you read, highlight what the passage says will be done by people who are righteous (on the right) and by the others (on the left), using a different colour for each.

Jesus often referred to himself as 'the Son of Man'.

'Righteous' means behaving in a pure, fair and just way.

By 'members of my family', Jesus probably meant all people, or possibly all Christians, not just his literal family.

In this passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus uses imagery which would have been familiar to people in Israel at the time when he lived, of a shepherd dividing his animals into different types. This passage is about what Christians call 'eschatology', beliefs about the last days of the world. ('Eschaton' means about the last things in ancient Greek.) Like most early Christians, Matthew was sure that the end of the world was very close.

In this passage, it is Jesus who is speaking.

*"When the **Son of Man** comes as King and all the angels with him, he will sit on his royal throne, and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the **righteous** people on his right and the others on his left. Then the King will say to the people on his right, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.' The righteous will then answer him, 'When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these **members of my family**, you did it for me!'*

*"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Away from me, you that are under God's curse! Away to the **eternal fire** which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels! I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink; I was a stranger but you would not welcome me in your homes, naked but you would not clothe me; I was sick and in prison but you would not take care of me.' Then they will answer him, 'When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and would not help you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.' These, then, will be sent off to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go to eternal life."*

**Matthew chapter 25 verses 31-46**

### To do...

 Who do people need to help others in order to be called 'righteous'?

### To do...

 What do you think is meant by the 'eternal fire'?

Matthew isn't describing an actual event – this is a passage with symbolic meaning. There are different ways to interpret this story, but Christians usually understand it as meaning that at the end of the world, Jesus will return and everyone who has lived will be judged by him. People who have lived a righteous life will go to heaven and the others, who have been unrighteous, will go to hell.

In addition to heaven and hell, Catholics also believe in purgatory, where souls undergo a time of purification in order to become holy enough to go on to enter heaven.

### To do...

 List three actions that Jesus describes as righteous.	 List three actions that Jesus describes as unrighteous.
 What will happen to the righteous people?	 What will happen to the unrighteous people?
 What does this passage tell Christians today about how to treat others?	
 How might they put this into practice in their everyday lives? Try to relate your answer to the work done by charities and how Christians could be involved with it.	

Luke tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Like the story of the sheep and the goats, this is usually understood to be a parable, a story with a deeper meaning, told by Jesus to teach his audience about judgement and the afterlife.

*"There was once a rich man who dressed in the most expensive clothes and lived in great luxury every day. There was also a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who used to be brought to the rich man's door, hoping to eat the bits of food that fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs would come and lick his sores.*

*The poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven.*

*The rich man died and was buried, and in **Hades**, where he was in great pain, he looked up and saw **Abraham**, far away, with Lazarus at his side. So he called out, 'Father Abraham! Take pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water and cool my tongue, because I am in great pain in this fire!' But Abraham said, 'Remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, while you are in pain. Besides all that, there is a deep pit lying between us, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross over to us from where you are.'*

*The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father's house, where I have five brothers. Let him go and warn them so that they, at least, will not come to this place of pain.' Abraham said, 'Your brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them; your brothers should listen to what they say.' The rich man answered, 'That is not enough, father Abraham! But if **someone were to rise from death** and go to them, then they would turn from their sins.'*

*But Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death.'"*

**Luke chapter 16 verses 19-31**

Hades, is the underworld, often understood to mean Hell.

Abraham and Moses were prophets. Abraham was seen as the father of the Jews, and Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt.

### To do...

 What was Lazarus' earthly life like?

 What was his afterlife like?

### To do...

 What was the rich man's earthly life like?

 What was his afterlife like?

### To do...

 Who do you think the rich man means by 'if someone were to rise from death'?

### To do...

 What is Jesus warning his audience about in this parable?

 How might this parable impact the way a Christian would treat others?