

PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS.

TEXT: MATTHEW 25: 31-46.

THEME: Do you accept or reject the Word of God that Christ has brought into the world?

Grace, peace and mercy, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the USA at the moment there is a transition period taking place in regards to the US presidency. The new President elect, **Barack Obama** has been chosen by the people of the US of A to be their new President.

And unless you were away on a mission to the deeper reaches of outer space or adventuring in some far-flung, hard to reach place of this planet during the past six

months or so, you would have been made well aware of this occasion through the media. It's been coming at you, day in, day out, the coverage was constant.

Big question, so how did the new president elect get there? For Barack Obama to reach the position of USA President he had to beat off **Hilary Clinton**: and by heck she was a very good opponent for him, I'll concede that much. In fact, she was a fairly obstinate, determined lady, who didn't give in, even when she was advised to do so when her cause was well and truly lost and the people had given up on her.

Not only was she "standing by her man" [when Bill was in the spotlight for the wrong reasons] she was standing up for herself and cause. She was the first obstacle in Obama's race for the presidency.

Then there is the final opposition barrier in the person of **John Mc Cain**. He also was no pushover, and in reality,

he brought nothing new to the table and the people voted against him, and the rest is history. At present, there is this transitional period that is occurring [the final duties of George W] before Barack is finally installed as the President of the good old, US of A.

Overall, as interesting as the developments and story as it was, the intriguing thing that grabbed my attention was what Mr Obama was offering to the people of his nation. Throughout his campaign; his main theme and message was that he was bringing change to the American people, and I believe that this was the overbearing factor that got him over the line.

Sure, as you just heard, he had to face opposition after opposition, there were also a lot of detractors, and not only from his political opponents, but also from the average man/woman in the street with his/her attitude as well. The White supremacists wanted to do him in, they didn't want no coloured man ruling them.

It was all against him, he had to convince the majority of the population that a black man can govern their nation, and to do it well. And that this was not just the pipedream that he and a few other wishful thinkers might have had, but that he was actually the man for the job.

And in the wash-up, when little truths are made known, it appeared that the American people were sick of all the sameness, and dreariness in their lives to the point of overkill. They were tired of the everyday politician making promises from the goodness of their hearts of what they're going to do; and almost immediately after taking office, they start reneging on them. So when this fresh faced somewhat different man comes along offering them change, then, perhaps he may be the answer we've been waiting for.

So now they wait, they're watching even as George W goes through the last rites of Office and then hands over

to Barack Obama. In fact, the whole world waits to see how this man will live up to his promises and expectations, and in particular, of how he will deliver upon them.

And this brings me to a point of a few millennia ago, God sent his dearly beloved Son Christ Jesus, to be the Saviour in this world because he didn't like what the people of the earth were doing to each other. They seemed to have lost the plot of why they were put upon the earth and of how to behave, interact and respect each other with dignity, love and admiration for who they are.

By the way folks, how much do genuinely care and love other people today, in church and outside of it? That's something to think about!

So, when Jesus came, he set about bringing change and enlightening people's hearts and minds so that their changed attitudes towards each other may promote a

better way of relating, loving, respecting, caring, and treating their neighbours [whoever they come into contact with] as they would treat themselves.

In fact, some people welcomed this change when they heard his message, because what Jesus was really offering; was a way of life. This life would have been a lot better than individual people struggling on their own and being isolated from help of any sort. The leaders of the day did what they want.

And that this way of living that Jesus is offering, is a change for the better; and a lot of people liked what they heard. While yet others at varying degrees, have reserved judgement and are still doing so at **this very moment, and are not making a decision about where Jesus fits into their lives.**

Let's just think about that for a moment! Let's reflect upon this question. Where do you think you'd be without

Jesus in your life? Recall again, how Jesus has gone out of his way and has gone to great lengths to make his Father's will known to us! In fact it cost him his life, which was of no consequence because he gave it willingly.

He did his Father's will *because he cares for you warts and all*, and loves us so very much, by the selfless giving of his life for everyone. Yet a lot of the Australian population are refusing his gift. Which makes me ask the question: 'Why do many of us do that? And my only conclusion is that there must be something better out there blinding them and stopping them from seeing this gift from the Lord. God doesn't stop giving, we stop listening and hearing.

Today, the gospel lesson is about the 'Sheep and the Goats', and there are no two ways about this; we are either one or the other. This is Jesus telling us how it is,

and it's also another way of telling people that they cannot serve two masters.

Have you seen this concept before? Perhaps you know someone or you've read or seen it on a TV program or such that someone is in love with two people. They're so mixed up in this triangle that they cannot choose one over the other. The truth is they have to make a choice even though it is hurtful, because somewhere along the line one of them will be rejected.

Perhaps you know this little cliché that '**a rose is a rose is a rose, call by any other name it is still a rose**'. The same applies to being a sheep or a goat, we may try and imagine they're the same, but they're not, they're definitely different. You don't call Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton, the differences are obvious. They may belong to and represent the Democratic political Party, but they as individuals are poles apart, and have nothing to do with each other.

God made us all individually, and we are all unique different single identities. There are three baptisms today, and God will receive each individual into his kingdom with all of their DNA and make-up simply because he loves them and he turns no one away.

Husbands and wives know the individual traits of each other, and it's how they treat and respect each other that make these marriages blessed or otherwise.

We class the family unit as one, and no matter what the number that make it up, small or large, everyone within that unit know the individual people, their characteristics and their personalities. There's a beauty and attraction in that aspect, because you get to know, grow, and share life's hurts and pains together.

And overall, that's what keeps the family loving and willing to protect honour and do whatever it takes to

nurture an environment that cares for each other. You will feed, clothe, and give them a drink whenever the need arises, you wouldn't let them suffer. You would do it for the least of them and this attitude will help you do that to your neighbour and to those who need a helping hand. Jesus encourages us to do so in our lesson today.

So in regards to the 'sheep and the goats', does the general population believe that Jesus is the Christ? I don't know the answer and I don't know how people keep themselves on track spiritually. I guess it's between them and God and all I can do is to keep his word close to my heart and inner being.

You may have an answer as to why people still reserve judgement about Jesus instead of making a direct decision that he can and does make a difference in many, many people's lives? There are billions of believers, but there are many more billions of unbelievers.

Then again, the sad truth is that these people may be out rightly rejecting what God brings into the world today. And what God and Jesus bring into the world today, there will always be opposition to it from one arch enemy to torment and turn people's thoughts away from God.

The Devil is not asleep; he knows what his punishment is, he knows that he is going to spend eternity in hell for being disobedient to God. So he is doing his best to take as many people down with him as he can.

And the sad irony is that people don't believe he exists, just like they would have convinced themselves that Jesus will still take any person into heaven when they die no matter what they've done or how they've lived their lives. The sad truth is that a lot of people believe this and it takes a lot to convince them otherwise.

Last Friday week ago, I was asked to go over to Port Lincoln to do a funeral [I come from there] of a well respected lady. There would have been five to six hundred people in attendance to pay their respects. And speaking with people afterwards, a few people had the attitude that everyone goes to heaven.

And the last thing you want to do is argue at a funeral wake where people will end up because of how they lived their lives. You put your life on the line. I always give the marriage analogy that if you're married then you be together and work at it; otherwise it's a marriage in name and you are not living the reality.

And finally, to those **who follow Christ and accept him at his word, you are the ones who are called his sheep.** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.