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## Summer Playlist

### Part 6 – Sheep or Goat

Paster Ted Cunningham

Today, we're going to be talking about the generosity of this church, and encourage more of it in the times that we are living in. Today's message comes from Matthew 25. If you have our Bibles or you want to open your Bible app to Matthew 25, we're going to pick up in Verse 31. To be clear, we're not talking about rewards; we're talking to begin in this parable. It's an issue of heaven or hell. Jesus is going to be very clear as he separates the sheep from the goats. That's going to be the first question we want everybody to be able to answer. Am I a sheep or am I a goat? Am I a true believer in Christ Jesus or am I pretender or an unbeliever? That today, for many, would be the day of your salvation.

Jesus is going to be very clear about feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and welcoming the stranger. And for many of us... I don't want this to be a guilt trip morning. The goal of this message is not to get people to question their salvation because for many people, we've just never been disciplined well in this. Today is a day of discipleship for those who have placed faith in Jesus. But we want to start by showing a picture. Before we put the picture on the screens, I want your first thought. Don't say anything. I'm really going to encourage you not to even make a noise, but just between you and the Lord. What is your very first thought when you roll up on this? (picture of a homeless couple sitting at a stoplight, holding a sign that says, "Homeless and trying to get by. Anything helps. God Bless") What's your very first thought?

I will share with you the thoughts I've had over my life. I would say a lot of people may relate to this. One of my first thoughts when I roll up on this is *Get a job*. The other thought that I'll have is *Why do you have a pet? Why are you smoking?* All of these thoughts run through my head. Do your thoughts change if this is a veteran on the street? Again, this isn't about a guilt trip, but today we are wanting to talk about the heart of God for the impoverished, the imprisoned, the sick, and that our heart – your heart, my heart – would follow the same.

Here's what we know about our kids. Kids are great lie detectors, aren't they? Our children... I have two adult children. My children share my faith, and they hold the scripture as their primary source of truth and I'm grateful for that. They've placed faith in Jesus, they walk with Jesus. They are growing in their faith. This is what I know. Grandma, Grandpa, Mom, Dad, we say it all the time at this church. Our children are watching, listening, remembering, and repeating. My children, who share what I believe, they are watching me like a hawk to see that my beliefs and behavior match the teachings of Jesus. And this is one area that we are talking about today that Jesus teaches us that our kids are watching. What is my attitude, what are my words when I roll up on a panhandler in Branson?

My daughter calls me Daddy. She always calls me Daddy. I've said I want nothing from you in life other than that term for the rest of my life. Call me Daddy. She only calls me Pastor Ted when I break the law. When I gently move through a stop sign... That's what I call it. I just gently move... there ain't nobody coming so I just tap the breaks and go. She'll say, "Good rolling stop, Pastor Ted." She'll look over at the speedometer and she'll sit back in her seat and go, "How fast you going, Pastor Ted?" I told her this is why Pastor Ted is not on my license plate. I went with the standard Missouri issued license plate so you don't know it's me. This is why I can ride up on you and help you get off your phone at the stoplight that's a green light. Get moving. I'll give you the courtesy tap until your still scrolling and then it's a long "Get off your phone and drive." She goes, "Good patience, Pastor Ted."

When I watch the news, my kids are watching. When we go through the last two years like we've gone through in our country, their watching. "Dad, does what you believe and what you preach and what you teach that comes from scripture, do you actually live it? Do you believe it?" I don't ever want to be the one who brings my political beliefs to the scripture. I want the scripture to drive what I believe politically. I want to live what Jesus teaches. My kids are watching.

Today, we are in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats. It's not a parable answering this question right here. It's a very important question; it's not the question that's being asked, but we still need to answer it. "What must I do to be saved?" In Acts 16... remember the jailer. I love this story. Paul and Silas are in prison. They start singing, there's an earthquake, chains drop off, the jailer wakes up. He was going to take his life because he thought that they had escaped. They say, "No, don't take your life. We're still here." What does the jailer ask? "What must I do to be saved?" They answer the question so clearly in that story. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Salvation comes by no other name. Salvation comes by nothing good you do or bad things you stop doing; it is in the name of Jesus. Call out to that name, confess that name, believe in your heart that he's been raised from the dead and you will be saved.

Today, the question for us is more of a discipleship question. What must I do now that I am saved? How must I live. I was sitting there listening to Alex's message last week, which was phenomenal. I agree with everything except Top Gun. I love Top Gun, I just didn't think it was the best movie I had seen in 20 years. I kept listening to the message, *The Walking Dead*, through the lens of Matthew 25. And many, last week, settled that decision and became followers of Jesus. Born again believers in Christ Jesus, what do you do after your salvation? What is your heart. Here's what I know. This isn't a guilt trip message. As we discuss sheep and goats for you to go, 'I'm doubting my salvation.' That's not the goal of this message. The goal of this message is that all of us would be disciplined with the teachings, the beliefs, and the heart of Jesus.

When I got saved, I was in a church that answered this question. Do you know how they answered the question, "What must I do now that I am saved?" "Attend church, tithe, read your Bible, don't smoke, drink, chew, or date girls that do." I can pretty much boil the discipleship message down to that. And that's how some of you were disciplined in your churches. Let's just be honest. Be at the church when the doors are open and don't do bad things. Francis Chan puts it this way when he's speaking of all that, Jesus gives us and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. "*Just to read the Bible, attend church, and*

*avoid big sins - is this really the passionate, wholehearted life of discipleship Jesus was calling us to?"*  
The answer is no. There's so much more.

Today, we want to look at my heart, your heart, follower of Jesus. What is it toward the hungry? We're going to be called to feed the hungry, care for the sick, and welcome the stranger. I've got to tell you over the last couple of years, believers in Christ Jesus in the united states of America have been tested on all three. I don't know how well we did. "Why are they hungry?" "It's because they are lazy." In the text today, we're not going to see Jesus asking us to question why. "I'm not going to give that person money. How do I know that they'll use it for food and not drugs?" When you start entering into mercy ministry, which is what we're taking about today, easing the pain, easing the suffering of those who are hungry, sick, and the stranger, which is what we're called to do, you're going to be taken advantage of. People are going to take advantage of you, people are going to hurt you. I've seen too many Christians try to help people, they're taken advantage of and then they quit. Don't quit. The people you're helping are not your source of life. Jesus is your source of life and calls you to the hungry, the sick, and the stranger.

Over the last two years, we've questioned people who are sick. Well, you're not really dying of COVID. You have bad habits in your life and that is ultimately why you're sick. Just some of the conversations we would have are, "But I'm supposed to feed the hungry, care for the sick, and welcome the stranger? Wait a second. Welcome the foreigner? What's their immigration status? Are they here legally?" I just wonder if part of the devil's schemes has been to turn the believers' heart away from the hungry, the sick, and the stranger. The very think that Jesus calls us to turn our hearts toward.

In Matthew 25: 31 - **31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.** We are talking about the end when believers and unbelievers are divided, the final judgement. **32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another...** Okay, so we're going to get to the parable. This is part of the parable, but this is not a made-up story right here. This is going to happen. The nations gathering before the throne. They'll be separated, believer and unbeliever. And then here is the word picture that is used to share this story. **...as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.**

In that day, it was very common for sheep and goats to heard together, to graze together, but when it came time for sheering, they would be separated. Jesus is going to use that illustration. **33 He will put the sheep on his right...** My republican friends, don't read more into this text than what Jesus is saying. This is not a republican/democrat thing. This is sheep and goats. You're like, "I disagree!" Listen, **33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.** And what he's going to do in this story is talk to each group. He's going to start by talking to the sheep. In John 10, he says, "My sheep listen to my voice. They want to know me. They want to hear from me. I know them, meaning they're mine, and they follow me. They do what I do, they do what I say." That's sheep. If you've been born again, if you place faith alone in Christ alone, it should change everything about your life. I think sometimes what we see in the church today is we have people who think they are sheep. They are actually goats because they like the justification piece; that first question. What must I do to be saved? They like that. Call on Jesus? "Ted, I want to go to heaven when I die. I just want to live down here however I want to live."

If your attitude is *I want to do my own thing, go my own way*, did you truly bow your knee to Jesus Christ?" Because when you place faith alone in Christ alone, it will change the way you live. It will change your heart toward people. Again, this is not to cause believers to doubt their salvation, but for those who want heaven without the actual following Jesus part, you need to go back to the moment in time where you think you made the decision and was it a real decision?

**34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.** You're going to get this in both talking to the sheep and talking to the goats. The sheep – eternal life in heaven with the Father. The goats, the pretenders, the unbelievers – and eternal fire in hell. **35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'**

**37 "Then the (sheep) righteous...** That's justification. Those who are declared righteous when you place faith alone in Christ alone, because of what Jesus does, not what I do. I am declared righteous so then the righteous, the sheep **...will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'**

**40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these...** And this is very important **...brothers and sisters of mine...** Scholars can be divided over what the brethren are in this text and who they are, but most believe it is the disciples of Jesus, those who accepted the message of the cross and followed after Jesus. What did it mean for them in that day? It meant poverty, it meant imprisonment, and Jesus is saying. "When they followed me, it brought hardship upon them, and you looked after them. You cared for them. And what you were doing for them, **...you did for me.'** I think as parents, we understand that. If you want to bless me as a parent, be nice to my kids. If you want me to come after you at a kids' athletic activity, say something bad about my kid. We get this as parents. But don't get lost in the brothers and sisters' piece that we should only be helping those who are believers and those who are following after the cross. Yes, that is a priority for us, but we are to show this kindness to all.

In Galatians 6, Paul says... By the way, this guy, Paul would take offerings for the churches that were being persecuted and the churches that were suffering. They weren't able to participate in the economy and they needed food. He would go to the other churches he planted to collect funds to help the brothers and sisters in Christ who were impoverished. **10 Therefore, as we have opportunity...** We'll talk about that in a moment because we all have opportunities that come before us each and every day, especially in this town. **...let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**

In Luke 6, Jesus says this: **35 But love your enemies...** So, it's not just your neighbors, not just brothers and sisters in Christ, but even for your enemies **...do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.** When I read that a couple of weeks ago, I was

just reminded of some of you who have been helping people. You've been practicing the teachings of Jesus in your life. You care for the sick, you feed the hungry, and you welcome the stranger and people have taken advantage of you. And it frustrates you. I get plenty phone calls with people emotional, sad, and mad. Keep serving. Don't quit when you're not treated properly. **36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.** What does it mean to be merciful? It means that we are called to ease the suffering of others.

I want to be really clear. I've already said it a couple of times and I'm going to say it very clearly before we move to the goat. Feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and welcoming the stranger does not save you. This is not the source of your salvation; it's the overflow of your salvation. If you are born again believer in Christ Jesus, you want to move toward these people. Jesus had a heart for the marginalized and he calls us to the same. Saved people feed the hungry, care for the sick, and welcome the stranger. Saved people, enter into the suffering of others. Make no mistake, it's messy, it's frustrating, it's hard, it can be expensive, but it's what we're called to do. Saved people are generous and sacrifice to ease the suffering of others.

I was thinking about members of our church this week. There has been so much online about maybe the church isn't doing enough after the Roe V Wade thing and has not done enough leading up to it. I kept thinking of story after story after story of the people in this church who help people constantly. The bottom line is you just don't know about it because we don't post it on Facebook. I have to remind us there is life beyond Facebook. There is a lot of life, there is glorious life beyond Facebook.

I was thinking about all these stories, but the Lord brought this one to mind and I wanted to share it with you because he was a dear member of our church. This is John Battistoni. He served in Stone County for years as part of the firefighters there. He went to be with the Lord. He passed away from COVID earlier this year. John was a character. I'm going to use that term. I remember when we met him once on the lake, he was in his boat and we were on our boat. There were a bunch of adults and a lot of kids. We're all ready to jump in and... This is a great 4<sup>th</sup> of July illustration. John stops us all and goes, "Nobody's swimming... until we sing the National Anthem." No lie. He plays it and we all stood there on our boats. He wouldn't let us move until we sang.

I had all these great stories come to mind this week. There is a box out here in the lobby that I think runs all the fire alarm stuff. One Sunday... This was 10 to 15 years ago. It was beeping. It wasn't going to keep us from having service; it was just annoying. The security team and the firefighters from our church were gathered back there. I walked up to do what I normally do – butt in where I don't belong. I was like, "What's going on? Can we get rid of that?" I was standing right next to John, and I said, "Can we just unplug it?" Well, you would have thought I was demon possessed. John whipped his head around to me and I kid you not, it wasn't a "That won't work, Ted." He just whipped his head around to me, got right in my face, and with passion goes, "Have you ever smelled burning flesh?" I go, "I preach about it, but I've never smelled it." He goes, "Well, if you had, you wouldn't be taking this so lightly." I go, "I'm bringing a solution. Don't you like people that at least bring a solution? Don't bring me your problem, bring me a problem and a solution."

Let me tell you where he really got me. He got me every time. His heart for the hungry, the sick, and the stranger... He would go to Jesus was Homeless, now Elevate and help families. Whenever I saw my phone ringing from John, I knew it was someone he was helping and wanting us, as a church, to partner with him in that. He always took responsibility for it. He moved people around, met the needs that they had. Let me tell you, there were very few phone calls with John where he wasn't in tears, being taken advantage by someone. I remember once he called me, and he was very emotional. He said, "This single mom and her kids were kicked out, they didn't have clothes or anything, literally on the street. What do I do?"

I go, "Just go get them and the church... This was what I love. The amount of ministry and mercy ministry you do, church family, that you never even know about. I told him to get them a place to stay for a few days until we can get this worked out. Go to Walmart and buy them clothes and get to the grocery store and get them the food that they need." And he was all about it, all the time. No questions asked. And when he was taken advantage of, guess what? He didn't quit. When he felt like his help wasn't even being received, he still offered it. What a testimony for each and every one of us, as we continue to lean in and practice all that Jesus taught us. Let's move to Verse 41.

**41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me... He is now speaking to the unrighteous, the unbeliever. There are many that are going to think they are sheep, there are many that are going to think they should be on the right and Jesus is speaking to them, and they are on the left. Again, not that these works save us, but these works aren't in your life because you weren't saved is what Jesus is saying. ...you who are cursed, into the eternal fire... People that think Jesus doesn't have a lot to say about hell, oh he does. ...prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'** Then they are going to ask the same question.

**44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'**

**45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'**

**46 "Then... those who never believed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, ...they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."**

So, you have to start today with the question that Alex asked last week. What must I do to be saved? Start there. Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, confess with your mouth that he is Lord, believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead and you will be saved. There is no other name by which you can be saved. Start there.

And then ask, "Now that I am saved, what must I do?" Feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger. I said it earlier but just to put it on the screen again, what if part of the devil's schemes is to turn us against the very people Christ calls us to feed, care for, and welcome.

Church, we've been tested in that the last couple of years. A pastor recently said the church was put to a test two years ago and we miserably failed. I don't agree with that assessment. I believe that as difficult and painful as it was, it was a great season for Woodland Hills Family Church to do all that we are talking about today. Many of you did that. What we're asking today is for many of you to join us. If I can just encourage you, don't let debates over what the government should or should not do keep you from doing what Christ calls you to do. Don't just put something off on the government. Does the city of Branson have to deal with panhandling and the homeless crisis in our community? Absolutely, and they are going to have those debates. You're looking at a guy that has so many opinions. I have more opinions than half the people in here. I have lots of opinions, but I don't want my political opinions or what's being discussed in the city or in our country keep me from doing what Christ has called me to do personally. Never allow it to be.

A few weeks ago, a precious couple came up to me. They are an RV couple. We love those RV... They're taking up the first six rows of our church right here. The couple met me up here and they said... And this is what I love about our senior adults at Woodland Hills. They've been so well trained on church membership; it's a passion for them. She said, "We're only in Branson half the year and we're in Texas the other half of the year. What does church membership look like?"

I said, "Well, you can't be a member." No, I didn't say that. Of course I didn't say that. I used this term that we've been using a lot more around our church and with our staff. I said, "Be on mission with us." I encouraged this couple to go to Starting Point, become a member of the church, and when they're here, if it's four months or six months, be all in on mission. Get here, serve here, feed the hungry, care for the sick, and welcome the stranger. But go all in. And then when you go down to Texas, get that bumper sticker that says, 'I'm not from Texas, but I got here as soon as I could.' Put that on your RV, find a church, join, serve, give, and there in Texas, feed the hungry, care for the sick, and welcome the stranger. Be all in.

That's the challenge we want to put out there today for our church family, to go all in with us here at Woodland Hills. What does that mean? How do we enter into this mercy that we are called to as followers of Jesus, as sheep?

Years ago, we started something called the mercy offering. Before COVID, it was the first Sunday of every month. The majority of our giving was physically here on campus. With COVID, we moved to like 65% to 70% of our giving now online, so many transitioned to that. So, it wasn't a once-a-month thing, but you'll see it in the drop down and many people still give to the mercy offering. That was set up so that we could give as a church family to meet the physical needs of the brothers and sisters in Christ here at Woodland Hills Family Church. We're not talking a \$25.00 gift card to go get a meal. We're talking we pay months and months of rent for some people, mortgages...

Whenever I bring this up... there are people right now going, "Oh no, the flood gates are going to open wide." As a church, we've never had an issue where need was brought to us and we were not able to meet it. So, after 20 years, I've never been worried about someone coming and saying, "Our electric has been turned off."

I don't know if you know this, but we've been a little warm here in the Ozarks lately. And we have senior adults right now with poor help that don't need to be sitting in a 100-degree home with no air conditioning.

So, we meet the physical needs of our church family the exact same way we meet the physical needs of students in Stone and Taney Counties. That we did through Care for Kids. Last week, we gave \$60,000.00 to meet the physical needs of students in Stone and Taney Counties. That's eye glasses, dental work, health care, buying gas for families that need help getting to school. It's paying some of the school fees for athletics... whatever the case may be. The counselors in the schools are in charge of it. What a great opportunity for us as we meet needs here and we meet needs in the community. One of the reasons we're putting the challenge out there today for you to go all in with us on mission here at Woodland Hills Family Church is we know that a lot of our church is beyond Stone and Taney Counties. Obviously, it's the majority of our church, but it is Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas. And we know there are more needs to be met where we are not in the school district so we're not in the individual school, and we want to find ways to be able to meet those needs.

Foster and adoptive families... This church has given large sums of money to help children in need of a home to find forever families. This week, last week, yes, I was celebrating the decision of the Supreme Court to overturn Roe V Wade. I was grateful for that and all the lives that will be saved. I want to say that to any lady in here, any dad in here, any grandparent in here who lost a child in an abortion, this church family, we mourn with you. So, we were rejoicing and mourning at the same time.

But then, last week just sickened me when I started seeing companies send letters to their employees... The shirt I'm wearing today, there are a lot of these shirts in my closet. The majority of brands in my closet – Patagonia, Orvis – I'll call them out, why not? They sent letters out, made it very public. They said, "We will cover up to \$4,000.00 of travel expenses to any one of our associates needing to travel to another state to get an abortion. I thought, *Lord, what can we do? We're being accused right now of not doing enough.*

I took the letter from Dick Sporting Goods, and I started sending it to business leaders in our church. Business leader friends who own businesses, companies around the country. I said, "Wouldn't it be fantastic for you and your company to send out a similar letter to say we will cover up to \$4,000.00 or \$5,000.00 of cost for those families in our companies who are fostering and adopting. What a simple idea that God can do something great with. I said, "Let's be the hands and feet of Jesus. Let's prove this."

I got a call the next day from an influential business leader in our town. I love this guy. He's been a dear friend for a long time. I loved his phone calls to me. His phone calls were usually, "Ted, this is so and so. Don't call me back. Don't bug me, Ted, I'm just leaving you this quick, little message. He said, "I just want you to know we will be funding adoptions in our company." If the Lord leads you to do that, be on mission with the church and give to your employees. The goal of business is not just to get the biggest profit you can as a follower of Jesus, but it's actually taking care of your employees as well.

I think we get a great illustration of that through Chick-fil-A, the Lord's chicken. This church continues to give to Returning Home. Shay Robbins is a teaching team member here and his brother, Nick Robbins, leads this great ministry, helping prisoners as they leave prison to reintegrate into society. What a great ministry you have. We have many people here who are called to minister to the needs of prisoners, while in prison and those transitioning out of prison. We will continue to help there.

A great ministry that we support and love partnering with is Convoy of Hope. Here's what I love about the generosity of this church. When the war in Ukraine took off and all of the refugees flooded out of there, I got a call. I have a call tomorrow with a Ukrainian refugee family here in the Ozarks and still more are trying to get here. I was just thinking about it. We can't have attitude, followers of Jesus, toward refugees, internationals. My son is on a class trips with the School of the Ozarks right now. I think this very moment, they are at the Statue of Liberty in New York. I just think of all the people that came into the country. Will the church be the one that welcomes, that has the arms wide open to help and to welcome the stranger and to welcome the foreigner? You gave \$25,000.00 within like a day or two to convoy of Hope who is going to meet the needs of refugees fleeing Ukraine. The Haitian school – we've been supporting kids in Haiti significantly with their Schooling, their food, summer food program, to help meet their physical needs.

These are just a few of the ways that your generosity, your giving meets needs and eases suffering in this community and around the world. As you leave here today, we want you to know every member is a minister. This is a core value of our church. If you are a follower of Jesus and you come across an opportunity today, meet it. If this church family can partner with you in meeting that need, we want to help. I just know sometimes people get confused and you just need to know this is not a pastor led church; we are an elder led church. We have people who get frustrated all the time that say, "The church wasn't there for me." What they really meant was the pastor wasn't there for them. This is an illustration about your pastor, but it's an illustration about all of you.

We have some people in this church who have had needs met by eight, ten, twelve different people in our church and for that, I applaud. But if I wasn't the one there handing it to them, they think the church let them down. No, you were met by minister after minister by this church. Go, be the body of Christ. Serve. Give. Meet the needs. We say it around here all the time, and we got it from Andy Stanley. *Do for one what you can't do for all.* Don't let the need overwhelm you so that you sit back and do nothing. When you see the need, do for one what you can't do for all.

We're going to end by taking a second offering. Boy, are we feeling Baptist today or what? If you want to go in on mission with us... Here are the four ways to give. We're going to leave them up there. And how God is calling you and leading you, we will leave that between you and the Lord.

Father, I pray that the one who is asking the question, what must I do to be saved? would come forward and meet with someone from our prayer team right now at the close of this service and believe upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. For all of us who call Woodland Hills our family, our church, that we would go all in on mission today. We pray all of this in the good name of Jesus and the authority of that name. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.