



Christ the King - Bible Study

Christ the king, king of compassion

Abstract

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 25:31–32(NIV)

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Sunday, November 22, 2020 | After Pentecost | Christ the King | Proper 29 | Year A

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24

Psalm Psalm 100

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24

Psalm Psalm 95:1–7a

New Testament Ephesians 1:15–23

Gospel Matthew 25:31–46

Matthew 25.31-46

In a dramatic image, a king separates people into two camps based on how they behaved towards vulnerable people: did they act with compassion towards them, or not?

This week's resources explore: an instinctive response to human need.

Further resources are available at: <https://www.dejongs.id.au/home/church/>

Introduction

The striking image portrayed in this passage is of the nations, gathered around the Son of Man when he comes in glory, being judged, and sorted into sheep and goats. He affirms those who reached out to others in need and expressed tangible love but condemns the unrighteous whose actions lacked compassion. Self-giving generosity is the basis of the judgement call and the characters are judged, not by Jesus, but by their own actions.

Those on the right reached out to the vulnerable. This symbolism appears in the Ezekiel passage where the prophet reports to the exiled Israelites that God is like a shepherd, searching for his flock. He is seeking to rescue them, reaching out to the lost and the suffering and restoring them, despite their failures.

The Gospel passage is not about salvation by works but points out that we are accountable for our actions. Neither the sheep nor the goats were aware of their actions, but their behaviour reflected their relationship with God. Those who loved God became a natural reflection of him and reached out to the hungry, thirsty, sick, strangers and prisoners.

The readings emphasise the importance of community and celebrate interdependence over independence. We are challenged to join in, to be participants rather than people who stand on the side-lines watching. In community we can draw alongside others in their need and reach out to them, and we will be held accountable for our actions.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Let us pray

We come to you,

people who are hungry, thirsty

strangers, imprisoned, exposed,

knowing that you have come to us, too,

in these same guises.

In our brokenness, welcome us.
 And open our defences as we come to you,
 O Lord that comes to us in the many guises of the world around us.

God, hiding in all strangers, all around us,
 we are sorry for what we have done,
 and what we have not done.
 We ask you to deepen your welcome in us,
 so that we might deepen our welcome around us.
 Amen.

Reading

Matthew 25:31–46(NIV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

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. 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 righteous 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 brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire 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.’

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 they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” ³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with

respond

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Exegesis

Two simple observations: note the confident tone – ‘When the Son of Man comes...’ (v.31) and the repetitious nature of the story.

The emphasis on what people have done leads some to ask if this is not ‘salvation by works’. But that is not what is intended. The separation of the people (v.32) is about what sort of people, gathered in his name, the Son of Man expects to find on his return. He expects to uncover a people whose love for God is evident in their relationships with all people. It is about tangible love (vv.35-40). Loving service is one of the most effective forms of witness. The Son of Man comes anonymously, which

means that the voice of the unrighteous – i.e. their actions – speaks just as loudly (vv.41-45), but with a negative ring. This ‘all together until the harvest’ (v.46; see 13.30) has been a notable feature of some of Jesus’ parables; and, interestingly, one of the complaints recorded in the Gospels against Jesus is that he mixed with the wrong people.

This parable says clearly that there will be judgement and therefore all will be held accountable for the way they live. But it is not a judgement scene in a courtroom setting. No witnesses are called, although there is evidence. Jesus has met, and been answered by, each person in the story. Self-giving generosity is the foundation for the judgement call, and – importantly – the characters are judged not by Jesus, but by their own actions. The judgement lies in the decisions they have made in their own lives.

The links between the lectionary readings

The Old Testament and Gospel passages outline a duty of care – but it is not one-sided. In Ezekiel, care is given and enacted by God to a vulnerable and hurting people in exile. In Matthew, the challenge for God’s people is to be like God in caring and reaching out to the vulnerable and the exposed.

One of the functions of the title ‘Son of Man’ is to draw attention to the humanity of God. In both passages, the exiles and the people waiting for the Son to return (a different sort of exile) need to be confident in the presence of God in their world. The judgement call for both is how to make this confidence tangible in their wider network of relationships. It is seldom an easy question. Do we give without demand for return – but in doing so take a risk? Or do we act – sensibly – to protect ourselves?

Picture pointers: ‘Have you ever thought that judgement lies in the choices you make?’

- Have you ever thought that judgement lies in the choices you make?
- How do you respond to the needs of others?
- To whom are you accountable for your actions?



Live your faith

Think of any gesture, no matter how small, that you can make to help someone this week – and do it; or do something to help a local cause.

We are sent out

O God of kindness,
 send us out with more time for interruptions,
 and more generosity for kindness,
 so that we, and those we meet might see you
 within our walls and those beyond them walls.

May the Lord bless us
 and keep us
 May His face shine upon us
 and be gracious to us
 May he lift up His countenance upon us
 and give us peace