



“TRULY I TELL YOU,  
WHATEVER  
YOU DID FOR  
ONE OF THE LEAST OF  
THESE BROTHERS  
AND SISTERS OF MINE,  
YOU DID FOR ME.”  
MATTHEW 25:40

**WHAT IS EXPECTED OF US** Matthew 25:31-46

If you enjoy narrative fiction the storyline often revolves around two competing factions vying for the loyalty of the main character. They may be factions within a community, a family, or even conflicting loyalties or inclinations within an individual. The characters in such stories often have varied levels of insight into the “battle” in which they are engaged. Some can be quite obvious to the influences upon themselves.

Eugene Boring has described our gospel reading in this way, “The two kingdoms that are confused and interwoven in the ambiguities of history now stand disclosed at the end of history.”<sup>1</sup>

“The kingdom of God is disclosed as the only true kingdom”<sup>2</sup> The apostle Paul describes the internal conflict that we grapple with, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”<sup>3</sup> So our lives are lived against a backdrop which periodically involves internal conflict.

This Sunday is referred to as “Christ the King” Sunday or “The reign of Christ” Sunday in the Lectionary. In recent times the church has been reticent in using language that can relate to imperialism in the church. We recognise that churches have a history of misuse and abuse of authority internally and within the broader community. However the teaching of Jesus revolves around the theme of “What is the Kingdom of God like?” “What is it like to live under the reign of Christ?”

The preceding passages in Matthew’s gospel relate to what it looks like to be ready for the return of Christ, for what it looks like to live as people of God’s kingdom. They have looked at what type of lifestyle will be commended when Christ returns.<sup>4</sup> Today’s passage is Matthew’s last passage of teaching regarding the kingdom of God and Jesus role in judgement when he returns. The gospels paint a multivalent picture of these themes using a wide variety of metaphors and images. It is important that we consider these images with wisdom and openness and in the light of the revelation of God which we see throughout Scripture.

Today we encounter a brief image of sheep and goats being separated, but then it returns to the story of the King speaking to people regarding their actions. It speaks of King Jesus. The nature of this king is crucial to an understanding of the kingdom he comes to bring.

These 15 verses manage to encompass a variety of key descriptors of Jesus. He is described as “Son of Man”,<sup>5</sup> King,<sup>6</sup> Lord,<sup>7</sup> Son of God – by virtue of referring to God as his Father,<sup>8</sup> Judge – by virtue of the role he undertakes,<sup>9</sup> the one who will return,<sup>10</sup> and the one who is embodied in the poor and the vulnerable.<sup>11</sup>

During this gospel Jesus tells his followers that His presence would remain with them,<sup>12</sup> in this passage they receive a strong picture of how fully Jesus identifies with them and all humanity, the experiences of the weakest and most vulnerable are also his experiences.

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew: Introduction, Notes and Commentary” in Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary in 12 Volumes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) 455

<sup>2</sup> Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew” 455

<sup>3</sup> Romans 6:19 NRSV

<sup>4</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007) 957

<sup>5</sup> Matt 25:31

<sup>6</sup> Matt 25:34

<sup>7</sup> Matt 25:37

<sup>8</sup> Matt 25:34

<sup>9</sup> Matt 25:34,41

<sup>10</sup> Matt 25:31

<sup>11</sup> Matt 25:40

<sup>12</sup> Matt 18:20, 28:20

The author of the letter to the Hebrews reinforces Jesus identification with all humanity, and all experiences of humankind, when he describes Jesus as becoming “like his brothers and sisters in every respect” even to the point of experiencing temptation and testing.<sup>13</sup>

So we are dealing with a king involved in judgement, but a king who so completely identifies with his people, all his people. A king who experiences what they experience.

The dual climaxes of this narrative are certainly the points where the righteous and then the unrighteous ask, with a clear indication of astonishment, “When was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or imprisoned and visited you?”<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus reply “Truly I tell you just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”<sup>15</sup>

Care for the poor was certainly imbedded in the history of the Israelites. Their law embodied elements to insure the wellbeing of the vulnerable in their communities. Their psalms described God’s particular care for the vulnerable.<sup>16</sup> Proverbs 19:17 reminds them that “the person who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.” Their prophets called them back to caring for the vulnerable.<sup>17</sup>

During the pandemic we have rediscovered the powerful impact of simple random acts of kindness. A new sense of community evolved during the strictest stage of our lockdown, pavement artists, wooden spoon people gardens, free impromptu neighbourhood libraries and produce exchanges all brought joy and greater connection in our communities.

Limitations on exercise propelled neighbours into new levels of reconnecting on the streets and in the parks.

Thom Rainer in his book “The Post-Quarantine church” identifies a subtle and prolonged pre-pandemic issue: the issue of churches progressively turning inward and therefore, perhaps unconsciously, and certainly unintentionally, eroding their community connections. He states “It was more of a year by year process of replacing the Great Commission with the great complacency.”<sup>18</sup> Thom spoke of some churches becoming more like religious, social clubs, serving themselves rather than others.<sup>19</sup> He states “The challenge has been laid. We cannot and must not return to the days of comfort and routine. We must move forward with Great Commission obedience and sacrifice.”<sup>20</sup>

His writings reminded me of the Old Testament readings we have encountered this week where God harshly reprimands the leaders of the people through the prophet Ezekiel, using the image of shepherds. He prophesies “You shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?... you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost”.<sup>21</sup> It sounds strangely reminiscent of Jesus words to the those who failed to care for others in our gospel reading.

I have certainly learnt that this community has a long history of caring deeply about those who are vulnerable and taking practical action to express that care. However, we also regularly need to hear the challenges that come to us in Scripture, not just the messages of comfort, hope and reassurance. As our church life begins to be able to take up new levels of activity as the pandemic restrictions ease, it is a good time for us to consider the priorities we believe we should take into the future, and what practical shape they may take as a community in this place.

This week we acknowledge that as followers of Jesus we are called to live under the reign of Christ the King, and in practice our readings have described ways in which we do this. Our readings today call us to very simple, practical acts of kindness and care. They remind us that these actions flow out of our love for God, and that they may have far greater significance than we attribute to them. The “Second Bite” program that this church has hosted is a very clear illustration of this type of practical care.

*Rev Joy Blamires*

*22nd November, 2020*

---

<sup>13</sup> Heb 2:17, 18; 4:15

<sup>14</sup> Matt 25:37-39 NRSV

<sup>15</sup> Matt 25:40 NRSV

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 68:5-6

<sup>17</sup> Jeremiah 5:28; 22:3

<sup>18</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church: Six urgent challenges and Opportunities*, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020) 48

<sup>19</sup> Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church*, 51

<sup>20</sup> Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church*, 49

<sup>21</sup> Ezekiel 34:2, 3b-4 NRSV

## PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE

God of wholeness, God of Grace,  
to you we bring our thanks and praise.

To a world that searches	you are a lamp that shines,
to a world that is hungry	you are food that sustains,
to a world that suffers	you are hope of release,
to a world that's broken	you are one who restores,
to a world full of hate	you are love that forgives,
to a world that denies	you are truth that endures.

To you we bring our thanks and praise.  
God of wholeness, God of Grace.

God of Jesus, God of all the world,

Bless the hands that bring wholeness to lives blighted by sickness.  
Bless the saints who in sad and desperate places bring a sense of hopefulness.  
Bless the Christians facing daily opposition, showing a faithful witness.  
Bless the generosity of the rich and powerful, for the gift of thoughtfulness.  
Bless the peacemakers working in conditions that are often hazardous.  
Bless the politicians whether good or bad, for their decisions affect all of us.  
Bless our words and actions as we carry your light into places shrouded in darkness.  
Bless your children, whoever they might be,  
with the warmth of your love and grace.

God of mercy,

give us eyes to see your face.  
ears to hear your cry.  
hands to reach out to you.  
a heart to know your presence.  
and mercy, that we may draw near to you,  
to know that your kingdom has come offering hope to our broken world

King of Kings and Lord of Lords, may your word be on our lips,  
as we pray together as Jesus has taught us saying, *(Lord's Prayer)*

Amen



*Ross Adams*



### **Home Group Notes**

***Anyone is welcome to join with us in this time of relaxed sharing of our ideas and responses to the theme we are exploring.***

#### **What Is Expected of Us**

Read Matthew 25:31-46

The sub-heading for this section is “The judgement of the nations”. It is one of a variety of passages referring to a time of judgement associated with Jesus return and the full realisation of the Kingdom of God. Look at Luke 17:20-21. We often speak of the kingdom of God “being here and yet not yet”. What do you understand by this phrase?

Read over Matthew 13:24-51. We have here a series of parables about the kingdom of God. Focusing on the fact that these stories were normally used to convey one significant idea in each parable, what do these parables tell us about the kingdom of God?

There are a few references in these parables to the separation of the evil and the righteous at the end of the age. This concept has sometimes been used to engender fear in the hearers. Fear can be a powerful motivator. It has in part, motivated the actions of much of our world over this past year, however alongside this fear there has been the value that we place upon all people and our relationships with one another. There seems to be a significant difference between fearing God and being in awe of God. Can you see ways in which a sense of awe before God may motivate people to embrace God’s good news?

We value our relationships and indeed we are called to love and care for one another and to love God. We speak of people having a “relationship with God”. How do you understand this phrase? How does this understanding connect with the reading we began with Matthew 25:31-46?

We affirm that God is just, yet we also affirm that God is gracious. How do these two affirmations impact on our understanding of judgement before God. The central message of the Christian faith is in the incarnation, the death and resurrection of Jesus and His ascension, exultation and reign. How does the good news of Jesus impact our understanding of judgement?

We have been exploring some weighty issues of Christian belief, however the bulk of the passage we are exploring is about very practical ways of living. How does this effect our understandings of God’s kingdom and judgement?

James 2:14-24 deals with the connection of faith and works. Read over the passage. How may this help our understanding of the passage we began with Matthew 25:31-46? Some people have claimed that the passage in Matthew justifies a belief that salvation is based on our deeds. What do you think about this?

The people in the picture before us (in Matthew 25) appear surprised by the thought of their actions or inaction being connected to their relationship with Jesus. We often hear this disconnect cited especially by some public figures claiming that their Christian faith does not effect their work. Can you identify ways in which we may fail to allow our beliefs to impact how we live? In what ways can the church community support one another in seeking to more faithfully integrate our beliefs and our actions?

On Sunday we also spoke about the challenge of the words of Ezekiel 34:2-4 and particularly the emphasis on being outward rather than inward focused. Can you envisage ways in which we can encourage one another and the Christian groups of which we are a part to maintain this outward focus?

Joy Blamires is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Home Group Nov 26 2020 Time: 02:00 PM Melbourne Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/91441661378?pwd=UHp0Q1pxdlorbEZYSUxpL2FzS0lLQT09>

Meeting ID: 914 4166 1378. Passcode: 138201

One tap mobile +61731853730,,91441661378#,,,,,0#,,138201# Australia