

Monday

Read Matthew 25:31-33

Jesus establishes right away in this passage that he is doing the judging and it happens rather quickly in this passage. The time for human choosing has ended, Jesus will now judge.

No one thinks they are on the wrong side of judgment. Everyone who has some measure of emotional health and well-being tends to assume that if there is a cosmic judgment between the good people and the evil people that they will be on the side they prefer (some people declare that they want to be on the side of evil, so in their minds they are on the right side of judgment).

And this is part of the reason why we love judgment – we think we are always on the favorable side of judgment. No matter how we live or what we think, we adjust our ideas of judgment (our own, society's, or God's) to keep ourselves on the favorable side of the ledger. We love judgment until we are the ones being judged. Then, instead of the harshness of justice, we demand the gentleness of grace. We disregard that we had no intention of giving grace to anyone else, but we ourselves want it. And once we have grace and escape judgment, we can get drawn back into meting out harsh judgment instead of grace.

Take a moment to be honest with yourself – how well does the above describe you and your approach to judgment? If you don't think it describes you now, can you remember a time when it did describe you? *Spend some time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to point out to you where you are in your beliefs on judgment and how well they match with how Jesus is saying that you should live.*

Tuesday

Read Ezekiel 34

Ezekiel 34 begins with the Lord speaking to the shepherds – especially those who have gone astray – and then transitions to speaking about the sheep in v. 11 and finishes starting in v. 25 with a look to the future God is promising His sheep (we will look at vv. 25-31 more this coming Sunday).

Sometimes as Christians we hear that we are Jesus' sheep, take that as our identity, and then inadvertently think we can do no wrong. I don't think many would claim that for themselves but we are all susceptible to deciding that we are righteous and that since we don't actively do something that it can't be our fault (Jesus definitely repudiates this in our passage from Matthew). God says in Ezekiel 34:17 that there will be a judgment between sheep and sheep... being a sheep isn't license to do what you want or an excuse for not engaging the troubles that exist in the world.

Ezekiel goes on to say that some sheep are being bullied by other sheep. Few people think they are the bully and it is more and more popular in this country for people to identify themselves as victims. Perhaps you can be a victim and a bully but that doesn't excuse being a bully. Be on guard to not take being a sheep for granted! God promises not to deal kindly with the fat, bully sheep, but will save the lean sheep and set the Messiah over them to feed them and God will be their personal God.

Today, pray for humility and for clear eyes to see your situation and the situation of the groups you belong to and identify with in the world. You may be a bully. You may be a victim. Maybe both. Maybe neither. The point of this passage isn't to make sure you are seen as a victim of the bullying sheep, the point is that God will protect his sheep. So be a true sheep and know that God will be with you.

Wednesday

Read Matthew 25:31-46

When Jesus returns with all the angels (the whole heavenly realm) it will be a grand and glorious moment, indeed. The Savior who was born on a dark night in what the world considered the middle of nowhere and which few people at the time knew had even happened will return in a way that everyone will know whether they want to or not. The return of Jesus is grand and royal in a way we can scarcely conceive. All the nations – all the humans who have ever walked the earth of every time and place – will be gathered together to witness the coming of the Lord. And they shall all stand before Jesus – no one has a special place, not even the church – and he will separate the sheep from the goats. Jesus will do the separating. The time for humans to decide is over, the time for Jesus to decide has definitively come. And there is no other distinction: not man or woman, rich or poor, white or black, etc. One is either a sheep or a goat.

To the sheep, Jesus says, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Spend some time in prayer today for the return of Jesus Christ. His coming will be glorious!

Thursday

Read Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus does not say, “I was sick and you healed me,” or, “I was in prison and you freed me.” No, the sheep don’t do anything so grand. The sheep feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe those needing clothes, and visited the sick and imprisoned. These are not the ministries of big, spectacular miracle workers, they are the ministries of regular, humble people acting with a bit of compassion.

What spiritual largesse, special skills, or mountain of resources to feed a hungry person or visit a sick person? None. Jesus does not demand in this passage that you alone solve world hunger, simply that you feed the hungry person you see. Jesus does not demand that to be a sheep you must find a cure for cancer, simply that you visit the cancer patient. In this passage, Jesus is opening the gates of the new heavens and the new earth to the simplest people of the world doing the simplest of things. In Jesus’ time and too often today, people who lacked food, shelter, and freedom were considered of little human or social worth. Jesus says those who tend to them are the sheep and the people of his pasture.

Be watchful that in your aim to be a humble sheep that you don’t neglect the gifts and resources that Jesus has given you to do His Kingdom’s work. Use what you have to do what you can when the opportunity is there. Pray for a heart that can see those opportunities, a mind that can see how you can serve, and a spirit to put God’s plan for those tiny moments into action.

Friday

Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and Titus 2:11-14

You were saved by God in Christ to not sit on the couch and proclaim that you are saved but to do God’s work. You were saved by faith and confirm that reality with what you do in response to God’s love by loving others.

For Sunday

Please read and reflect upon Ezekiel 34:25-31 and Matthew 24:29-31.