

Last Sunday of the Church Year

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

The Lord GOD Will Seek Them Out

11 “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

20 “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, 22 I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

34:11 *Lord God* – The double name for God here is literally, “Adonai Yahweh” or “my Lord Yahweh, and occurs some 293 times in the OT, mostly in the prophets, and in fact 217 are in Ezekiel. Adonai is always in the plural when used of God (just like the general title Elohim, “God”) and thus witnesses to the triune nature of the Deity. There is sense of “having supreme rank, power, authority; being above all others in character, importance, excellence.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

I myself will search for my sheep. Having dealt with the faithless shepherds (vv. 1–10), the Lord committed himself to shepherd his flock (see Jer 23:3–4). (CSB)

In these verses, the tender, loving care for His miserable fallen creatures demonstrates that the God of the OT is not a wrathful ogre delighting in crushing helpless victims. He is the Father who sent His Son to seek and to save the lost. (TLSB)

In a world where it is increasingly difficult to find Christian leaders in any area of life, it is comforting to know the Lord has promised to get personally involved in caring for the needs of His people when those who should be providing leadership aren’t doing their jobs. (PBC) – LUKE 15

Human faithfulness has frustrated His intentions; if it is going to get done. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

Through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are sheep of the Good Shepherd (Ps. 23:1). “For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care” (Ps. 95:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:12 *as a shepherd* – This refers again to this careful seeking (baqarah, verbal noun) of a shepherd who finds himself “in the midst of” a “scattered flock.” Yahweh has a people. When He comes to be with them, He discovers they are scattered. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

I will rescue them – wehitstalti implies that they have fallen into danger or under oppression. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

from all the places. Babylon was not the only place where the Israelites had gone (see Jer 43:1–7). (CSB)

day of clouds and darkness. The day of the Lord that had come upon Israel when Jerusalem fell in August of 586 B.C. (CSB)

34:13 *I will bring them out.* The promises of restoration—begun in 11:17 and repeated in 20:34, 41–42; 28:25—find special emphasis in this part (chs. 33–39) of Ezekiel (see 36:24; 37:21; 38:8; 39:27). (CSB)

God promises that He will “bring them out from the nations.” The people of God had been deported to Babylon, where they would live in captivity for 70 years. God’s promise to restore them gives hope. ((Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

mountains of Israel.† Compare the tone of 6:3–7 with judgment now past (see v. 12). (CSB)

their own land – Israel, land flowing with milk and honey, was given to them solely by God’s grace and according to His promises. Our “own land” is heaven, which God will give to us by His grace. We too are foreigners and exiles on earth, for our citizenship is in heaven (Heb 11:14-16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

bring them into their own land – The tribes of Israel were each given a portion of the Promised Land, though the priestly clan of the Levites was given God Himself, not land, as their inheritance (Dt 10:9; see note, Ps 119:57). Inheritance is an important expression of God’s graciousness in the OT. He gives lovingly and freely to His people as a father lovingly provides for his children. God’s chosen people are His portion and treasured possession (Dt 32:9). (TLSB p. 7)

34:14 *I will feed them.* See Isa 40:11; Jn 10:11. (CSB)

Isaiah 40:11, “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; [baby sleeps to beat of heart of dad or mom] he gently leads those that have young.”

good pasture...mountain heights...grazing land – God gives far more than the minimal essentials. The best is yet to come for us sojourners. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:15 *I myself will be the shepherd* – Sheep are not “in good hands” with a hired shepherd (Jn 10:11-13). Our Sovereign King is also our Good Shepherd. He feeds us from His hand just as a shepherd feeds his sheep. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

make them lie down – A shepherd leads the flock to the best areas for grazing and rest. (TLSB)

34:16 *I will seek the lost* – That no one was “searching for, seeking” (6 ,34:4 ,שׁוֹרֵץ) the sheep is remedied by the promise that Yahweh himself will do so (שׁוֹרֵץ, “seek,” in 34:16), as fulfilled in the NT, when “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10, with ζητέω, which the LXX uses in Ezek 34:4,

16; ἐκζητέω in 34:6). Likewise, Christ himself is the man who “seeks” the one lost sheep in Mt 18:12. (CC)

the fat and the strong. This verse is a good example of the biblical theme of the Great Reversal, like Lk 1:53: “He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:20 *I, myself will judge* – Cf Mt 25:31–46. (TLSB)

34:21 *push...thrust* – When leaders abuse their high calling, the people begin to abuse one another. Then the weak are taken advantage of. (PBC)

History judges churches, nations and societies on how they treat the weakest among them.

Horns – An image of power. Animals with horns are bold; in Israelite thought, a horned animal with its head held high symbolized strength and triumph. (TLSB p. 842)

24:23-24 So much is packed in these two verses that one could almost construct an OT Christology from them. (CC)

If God is to break the power and reign of sin, He must send into this world His own vice-regent, His servant David. This future human-divine Shepherd and Prince will not destroy the sheep but feed them with bread from heaven (Jn 6:32–40). The brilliance of divine revelation shines into coming centuries. Ezekiel sees this transformation from doom to delight in the perspective of prophetic vision. Past, present, and future merge into a single dimension of timeless fact. The old covenant blends into the new covenant. (TLSB)

34:23 *my servant David*. † A ruler like David and from his line (see Ps 89:4, 20, 29; Jer 23:5–6). Under great David’s greater Son there would be one flock, one Shepherd who will feed them with the bread from heaven (Jn 6:32–40; 10:16). (CSB)

The 12 tribes of Jacob were divided into two kingdoms after Solomon’s death. Under great David’s greater Son, there will be one flock, one shepherd. (TLSB)

34:24 *my servant* – This is the same term used in Isaiah of the Suffering Servant (Is. 42:1; 53:1 etc.). He will bestow upon His blood-bought people all the promised covenant blessings in richest measure. These blessings – the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation – are already ours by faith. We will experience their fullness in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

shall be prince – This literally means “one lifted up,” a leader or ruler. In the same eschatological vision of Ezekiel 40–48, this same Hebrew term will be used of the Prince over the people in the eternal kingdom (Ez 45:7, 17, 22; 46:2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 16–18; 48:21–22). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

No one will occupy the throne after Him, for He will be the Prince forever (37:25). Cf 2Sm 7:11–16; Is 9:5–6; 11:1–2; Jer 30:9. For Jesus’ human ancestry from David’s royal house. (TLSB)

34:11–24 In place of unfaithful shepherds, God will provide one Shepherd, Jesus Christ (“My servant David”; v 24). Notice how Matthew captures King David’s ancestry and how it culminates in Jesus Christ

as Savior (Mt 1:6b–16). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who faithfully provides God’s Word to all generations. He brings restoration to a world weary with sin. • Precious Savior, thank You for taking my sins on Yourself and restoring my relationship with the Father. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

The Resurrection of the Dead

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For “God[c] has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

15:20 Leaving behind the depressing hypotheses which filled the previous paragraph (1 Cor. 15:12–19: “if there were no resurrection of the dead ...”), Paul gives a ringing affirmation: “But as it is [vov̄i δέ], Christ has been raised from the dead” (15:20). The Corinthians should never doubt this basic tenet of their creed, nor should they doubt its implications for their own resurrection. For the risen Christ is not the only one who would rise; he is the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (15:20; cf. Rev 1:5). Just as the Israelites brought the sheaf of firstfruits to the Lord on the “Sunday” after Passover as a sign that the whole harvest belonged to him (Lev 23:9–15), so Christ’s resurrection was the pledge that all who had fallen asleep in him would be physically raised as he was. (CC p. 568)

but – nuni – But now, just now, but as it is, meaning that it is a fact and this is the end of all speculation. (TLSB)

Christ has indeed been raised. Paul’s categorical conclusion based on his evidence set forth in vv. 3–8. (CSB)

“Christ has indeed been raised.” The verb *hegēgertai* is the perfect passive of *hegeirō*, “to raise.” This verb form expresses the certainty of Christ’s bodily resurrection as an accomplished fact. This is the 7th occurrence of the verb in this chapter. “Make no mistake,” Paul is saying, “Christ has been raised!” It is done! We know it and believe it! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

But He came forth alive from the grave in which He lay and destroyed and consumed both devil and death, who had devoured Him. He tore the devil’s belly and hell’s jaws asunder and ascended into heaven, where He is now seated in eternal life and glory.” This is to be comfort and defiance. For on His name we are baptized, and we hear and profess His Word. After Him we are called Christians, and for His sake we suffer every misfortune and grief from the hand of the devil. For this is not aimed at us but at Him and His kingdom, whose enemy the devil is. He tries to destroy it, and he treats us so roughly and wearies us with pursuit, harassment, and death so that we might forsake Christ. (Luther)

The apostle comes now to the triumphant assertion of the fact, the proof of which he has already stated.
(CB)

firstfruits. The first sheaf of the harvest given to the Lord (Lev 23:10–11, 17, 20) as a token that all the harvest belonged to the Lord and would be dedicated to him through dedicated lives. So Christ, who has been raised, is the guarantee of the resurrection of all of God’s redeemed people (cf. 1Th 4:13–18).
(CSB)

The earliest portion of a harvest, which Israel sacrificed to God in thanks for the full harvest to come.
(TLSB)

The first of any crop, herd or family was given to the Lord. This represented all the rest of the crop, herd or family. In this case it means that Christ’ resurrection includes the resurrection of everyone else.

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ἀπαρχή—This is one of the Greek words the LXX uses (e.g., Ex 23:19; Ezek 44:30) to translate בְּפִרְיָיִם, the “firstfruits” God commanded the Israelites to offer to him (e.g., Ex 23:19; 34:22, 26; Lev 23:17, 20). The “firstfruits” were the first produce from the harvest, with the full harvest yet to come. The LXX also uses the word to translate בְּכֹרֶת, the “firstborn” son and “firstborn” animals that were to be offered to God (e.g., Ex 22:28; Deut 12:6, 17). The NT regularly uses this term of a first installment which betokens a greater fullness to come (Rom 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor 15:20, 23; 16:15; 2 Thess 2:13; James 1:18; Rev 14:4). Cf. LXX Lev 23:10. (CC p. 566)

And what is more than that, by calling Christ “the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” Paul wishes to signify that the resurrection is to be viewed and understood as having already begun in Christ, indeed, as being more than half finished, and that this remnant of death is to be regarded as no more than a deep sleep, and that the future resurrection of our body will not differ from suddenly awaking from such a sleep. For the main and best part of this has already come to pass, namely, that Christ, our Head, has arisen. But now that the Head is seated on high and lives, there is no longer any reason for concern.
(Luther)

15:21-22 Luther: “St. Paul is still speaking only about those who are Christians. These he wants to instruct and console with this article. For although also the non-Christians must all arise, this will not be to their comfort and joy, since they will arise for judgment and not for life.... I will say nothing of that great vulgar throng which seeks its pleasure and consolation only here, which [despises] God’s Word and cares not a mite for God and His kingdom. It is not surprising that such people are annoyed to hear of the blessed resurrection; for us, however, it is pure joy, because we hear that our greatest Treasure, over which we rejoice, is already in heaven above, and that only the most insignificant part remains behind; and that He will awaken this, too, and draw it after Him as easily as a person awakens from sleep” (AE 28:114–15). (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 25:31-46

The Final Judgment

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ 40 And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,[a] you did it to me.’

41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44 Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ 45 Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

25:31–46† The great Shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats (v. 32) once said: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters” (12:30). The separation takes place before any deeds are mentioned. Whether a person has been against him or for him has been documented by that person’s deeds—deeds of mercy done or left undone. The merciful will find mercy in the judgment, as Jesus had promised (5:7)—and mercy it is; for the Judge buries all their failures in forgiving silence and remembers only their deeds of mercy. The unmerciful have committed themselves to the unmerciful enemy of God and share his doom, that *eternal fire* (v. 41) which God did not design for human beings. (CSB)

Kingdom of God parables are abundant in the chapters before our text. In ch 24 Jesus speaks about the signs of the end of the age. In 24:36 Jesus talks about the day and hour unknown. Ch 25 contains three end-time parables. The parable of the sheep and the goats is the last of the three. The chapter begins with the parable of the ten virgins followed by the parable of the talents. These are, of course, popular sermon texts for the Last Sunday of the Church Year. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

All of this falls within the last week of Jesus’ life. It makes sense that these teachings of Jesus are quickly followed by events that lead to his cross. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

25:31 *when the Son of Man comes* – The only element unknown to us is the time.

“Son of Man” recalls the prophecy of Dan 7:13–14, in which all nations are gathered and the Son is seated before them on his throne (Dan 7:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

ho huios tou anthrōpou, translated “Son of Man.” This is a self-designation Jesus uses many times in the New Testament. The phrase occurs 85 times in the New Testament. It occurs four times outside of the Gospels: once in Acts, once in Hebrews, and twice in Revelation. Most occurrences are in Matthew, with 30. Other Gospels have fewer: 14 in Mark; 26 in Luke; and 11 in John. However, the large number is indicative of a common self-description of our Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

In his commentary *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), Leon Morris states that the first use of Son of Man is found in Matthew 8:20. “It is a literal translation of an Aramaic expression commonly used with the meaning ‘man.’ . . . The expression has caused endless comment.” In Matthew it appears for earthly mission, his rejection and suffering, and for his future glory. “The expression was not an accepted messianic designation, which makes Jesus’ extensive use of it rather puzzling” (p 201). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

The reckoning as it will finally be made is here described; for the day of doom is inevitable. Another impressive passage, awesome in its very simplicity, in the absence of all seeking for effect. He who was within two days to celebrate His last Passover on earth and then to be crucified, here fitly sets forth the glory of His triumph, as Jerome remarks. In glory, the glory of heaven, the glory of His Father, the glory which was His before the world began, before He entered into the weakness and lowliness of our sinful flesh, He will come, accompanied by all the angels, as His messengers, ministers, and courtiers. (Kretzmann)

sit on his glorious throne – Cf Dn 7:13–14, where the Son of Man is presented as holy but never actually sits on heaven’s throne. Here, the Son of Man sits in glory as God. (TLSB)

kathisei epi thronou doxēs autou, translated “he will sit upon his throne of glory.” R. C. H. Lenski, in his *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943) states that our Lord’s throne of glory is at the right hand of God the Father. As the Son of Man, he made his throne of glory the cross for our sake and our salvation. Those with the gift of faith in Jesus will recognize the scope of his throne. It is a place he *vacated* to become the Son of Man (pp 986–87). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

25:32 *before him will be gathered all the nations* – The righteous should have no fears of not being included and the unrighteous will have no choice.

Every single human being who ever lived or ever will live is going to be present. No excuses, No exceptions. It staggers the imagination. “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake” (Daniel 12:2). Just think what it would be like to be in the Arlington National Cemetery when Jesus comes back! (PBC)

Sheep and goats are not described as being judged on this day, but rather separated. Accordingly, this parable is not primarily about judgment but about the revelation and public vindication of true believers. (TLSB)

I conclude that “all the nations” gathered before the royal Son of Man are all the people who have ever lived on earth, with all to whom the Good News of God’s reign has been proclaimed. (CC)

he will separate people – This will be done on the basis of the faith that was given to Christians and which they retain to the end. This separation is done before any deeds are mentioned. It is and will be a great comfort to all believers.

This reflects the fact that “nations” will not be judged as wholes; rather, the individuals within them are judged. (CC)

25:33 *sheep on his right but the goats on the left* – In the ancient world, the right hand was regularly associated with privilege or honor. (TLSB)

Those on his right are repeatedly called “the righteous.” They are believers – who else can they be? Here are the individuals from among all the nations who have become Jesus’ disciples because the Good News of God’s reign in Jesus has been preached to them (24:14; 26:13; 28:19). (This unit simply does not address the question of individuals who have never heard the Good News. Neither does it offer any support for the idea that some would have a “second chance” after death to hear and believe the Gospel or that is any loophole that would exempt anyone from participation in this judgment.) On his left, by contrast, are the people from among all the nations who have not responded to the preaching of the Gospel in faith and discipleship. They are the “accursed” (25:41). (CC)

ta men probata ek dexiōn autou, translated “sheep out of his right,” and *ta de epiphia ex euōnumōn*, translated “goats out of his left.” R. T. France (*The Gospel according to Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985]) states that sheep and goats are hard to tell apart. The parable of the weeds in Mt 13:24–30 provides a good analogy to Jesus’ use of sheep and goats (p 356). In the parable of the weeds, Jesus uses the word *zizania*, translated “weeds” (a weed that resembles wheat), in both the parable and in his explanation of the parable in Mt 13:36–40. Sheep are an Old Testament image of God’s people. Right and left equals favor and disfavor or good or bad fortune. Jesus the Good Shepherd never uses the word *goat* in any of his other teachings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

A shepherd can easily tell the difference between a sheep and a goat. So, on the Last Day, it will be simple matter for Jesus to do the task that He declined to let His disciples do earlier in Matthew 13:28-30. (PBC)

That is the first act of the Judgment, the separating, the fixing of an impassable gulf. The sheep are those that followed the great Shepherd, Jesus, willingly, that heard His voice, the believers; the goats are those that refused obedience to His gentle rule, that were disobedient to the Gospel, the unbelievers, the hypocrites among the Christians, the entire godless world. (Kretzmann)

25:34–40 Rewards in the kingdom of heaven are given to those who serve without thought of reward. There is no hint of merit here, for God gives out of grace, not debt. (CSB)

Your present justification is the revelation of the Divine counsel, and a preparation for future glory...Let none, therefore, doubt that he is loved who already loves. The love of God freely follows our love which it preceded. (TLSB)

25:34 *King will say to those on his right* – Fitting title, given the coronation theme in Dn 7. (TLSB)

blessed by my Father.† God’s work of blessing began in his creation (Ge 1:22), continued in history (Ge 12:2), was active in the worship and life of his people (Nu 6:24; Eph 1:3) and comes to its eternal climax here. (CSB)

Note the sequence: first the call to the sheep with the granting of the inheritance, and then the description of their works. Blessed is the key. The sheep are called that first, not as a result of any works, but solely because of the Father’s grace. Blessed is a Gospel word, not a Law word. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

inherit the kingdom prepared for you – *klaronomasate* can only mean that they receive a gift attained for them by Christ. See Romans 8:17. (CSB)

No one earns an inheritance. Inheritances are given because of who someone is, not because of what someone has done. (Concordia Pupil Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Your present justification is the revelation of the Divine counsel, and a preparation for future glory.... Let none, therefore, doubt that he is loved who already loves. The love of God freely follows our love which it preceded” (SLSB, p 155). (TLSB)

In this picture, the Judge stands out most strongly: the former lowly and despised Nazarene, now the King of glory, King of kings, and Lord of lords. This King calls those at His right hand the blessed of His Father, since they by faith received the benediction of the Father, by which all good gifts were imparted to them, and by which they became the children of God. Having continued in this faith, they are now, spiritually considered, become of age. They are to enter upon the undisputed possession and enjoyment of their inheritance, of the estate which has been prepared and ready for them since the foundation of the world, since the eternal counsel of God for the salvation of mankind was made, Eph. 1, 4. It is a kingdom which they are about to inherit, for they have been made kings and priests unto God, His Father, Rev. 1:6. And the reason for this wonderful gift? (Kretzmann)

One of endless, heavenly glory. (CB)

25:35-36 This story does not teach that people are justified before God on the basis of works. The sheep receive their blessing and inheritance from the Father before a single word about their good works is spoken. Scripture teaches that people do good works in God’s sight only after they have come to faith and been justified by Christ. Good works are the result of salvation, not its cause. See Ap V 250–51. (TLSB)

And the reason for this wonderful gift? A reward for their faith, as shown in the ordinary, everyday deeds of kindness to the lowly brethren of Christ: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, showing hospitality to the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned; outward expressions of love flowing from the love of Christ, as an evidence of faith. Christ expects no heroic acts. He demands no miracles, but He will judge the world in righteousness, making these deeds of kindness and charity the basis of His judgment; for it is impossible to perform even the smallest act of kindness in His spirit without faith in Him in the heart. (Kretzmann)

Note the parallels to the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3–12). There, as here, it is the Lord himself who suffers the various deprivations, and the saints are those who have suffered with him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

25:35 *for I was* – *gar* is evidential and not causal. The works of the blessed were evidence, of belonging to Christ.

Welcomed me – Hospitality is proof of true love.

25:36 *was in prison* – Here it means utter destitution.

25:37-40 The humility of the believers may cause them to disclaim any personal knowledge of Him and therefore of any personal service rendered to Him; but Christ quickly instructs them on this point, telling them that such works, done without all ostentation, without any idea of personal gain, are in reality the truest service they can render to Him. (Kretzmann)

25:37 *the righteous* – *dikaioi* is a forensic word. Their sins are not mentioned. Only deeds done in faith are mentioned.

Interestingly, those called righteous are surprised at what is being said about them. Far from being boastful about the good deeds worked in them by God’s Spirit, they are completely ignorant of them. (TLSB)

hoi dikaios, “the righteous.” Those on Jesus’ right have already been righteous, apart from these good works just announced, by faith in Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

when did we – Christians don’t dwell on their deed of love. The Christian’s whole life is summed up in “faith which works through love,” Galatians 5:6. Through the Gospel he lives in constant freedom in his conscience.

Humility astonished at high honor put on poor services. (CB)

25:38 *welcome*. This word is particularly connected to the early Christian practice of providing hospitality for traveling missionaries. Examples of hospitality are found in Ac 16:14–15; 17:5–9; 18:7–8; 21:8. (TLSB)

25:39 **IN PRISON** – This held special significance for the first Christians, because so many of them, particularly their leaders, were arrested for the faith (e.g., Acts 5:18; 12:3-4; 16:23). (TLSB)

25:40 *truly I say to you* – This is used of an unalterable truth uttered by the incarnate Christ.

Upon as much as. Means “as much as,” referring to everything that the sheep did for the least of Jesus’ brothers. It is very difficult to imagine Jesus speaking to the righteous or the accursed and telling them that how they treated individuals in their midst (or something like that) serves as the criterion for judgment. (CC)

did it to one of the least – Good deeds come one by one to one by one. Unbelievers start with the delusion of big things which attract attention but will be rejected. Believers start with little things for the least but do not dwell on them.

Important theme in Mt is that Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us” (1:23; 18:20; 28:20). This verse stresses that Jesus is with the Christian community in such a way that we serve Him when we serve others. (TLSB)

you did for men – Expressive of the intimate and endearing union of Christ and His people. (CB)

25:41 *on his left* – Before God there is no predetermined “left hand” meaning eternal damnation, but only a “right hand” signifying life everlasting. It is really upsetting of God’s plan that “any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). Since, however men willfully transgressed his commandments, punishment became necessary, justice must be executed. Sternly the Judge addresses himself to those at the left.

Prepared for the devil – Hell was not prepared for human beings. Those who reject the Lord will go there because the wicked cannot stay with the righteous. Cf Rv 20:10. (TLSB)

God does not say “prepared from the beginning of the world.” God’s original plan did not call for the damnation of anyone. The left hand was a later addition, prepared only for the devil.

Some people will go to hell. God “wants all men to saved” (1 Timothy 2:4), but the teaching of Jesus makes it clear that God will not get all that He wants. God’s original purpose in creating hell was not to prepare a place for sinful people. No, hell was “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Nevertheless, the goats who are on the King’s left will join the devil and his angels in eternal flames. (Perhaps this explains why the goat’s head has become a Satanic symbol.) (PBC)

A fearful arraignment and a just of those on the left hand of the King: Instead of the "Blessed" which they expected a "Cursed," instead of the "Come" a "Depart from Me." Several very important points: He does not say, Cursed of My Father, for they have brought the curse upon themselves. The everlasting fire was not prepared for them, but "really only for the devil and his angels. And this fire was not prepared from the beginning of the world, God had no counsel according to which He willed the damnation of any man. They have no one to blame but themselves, this just sentence strikes them by no one's fault but their own. (Kretzmann)

25:42-46 fearful arraignment and a just of those on the left hand of the King: Instead of the "Blessed" which they expected a "Cursed," instead of the "Come" a "Depart from Me." Several very important points: He does not say, Cursed of My Father, for they have brought the curse upon themselves. The everlasting fire was not prepared for them, but "really only for the devil and his angels. And this fire was not prepared from the beginning of the world, God had no counsel according to which He willed the damnation of any man. They have no one to blame but themselves, this just sentence strikes them by no one's fault but their own. (Kretzmann)

25:42-43 The undone works are only a symptom of the real problem: lack of faith. If they had called on the Lord in faith, He would have forgiven them, prepared them, and completed good works in them. See LC I 191-92. (TLSB)

25:42 *you gave no* – The humble deed of the blessed are evidence of what they are. Likewise, the total lack of even humble deeds of the cursed are evidence of what they are.

25:44 *minister to You?* Offer service, particularly in physical needs. Cf Heb 11:6. (TLSB)

25:45 *you did not do it to me* – Men who neglect the wants of Christ's people, neglect Him. (CB)

Apart from faith in Christ and His forgiveness, all of our sins and shortcomings remain offenses against God, for which He shall hold us fully accountable. (TLSB)

25:46 *eternal punishment* – The punishment of the wicked is justice because they rejected God.

Righteous into eternal life – The blessedness of the righteous is just because by their faith they are oi dikaioi.

The difference between those who are in Christ and those who stand outside of His forgiveness cannot be stated more clearly. The difference is as great as heaven and hell. See AC XVII. (TLSB)

25:31-46 On the Last Day, Jesus will separate true believers from hypocrites and those who reject Him. The faithful will be vindicated and welcomed into heaven, while unbelievers will be condemned. Having received forgiveness through faith in Christ, God's flock eagerly await the day on which they shall be publicly vindicated and receive eternal life. • Grant us a faith that perseveres until the end, O Lord. Move us by Your Spirit, that our good works continually glorify You and benefit our neighbors. Amen. (TLSB)