

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR SUNDAY – NOVEMBER 26, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

¹¹ For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will sort them out. ¹² As shepherds sort out their flocks when they are among scattered sheep, so I will sort out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them into their own land, and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strays, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

²⁰ Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I MYSELF WILL **JUDGE** BETWEEN THE FAT SHEEP AND THE LEAN SHEEP. ²¹ Because you pushed with flank and shoulder and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²² I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged, and I will **JUDGE** between sheep and sheep.

²³ 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 the Lord have spoken.

Matthew 25:31-46
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE GATHERED BEFORE HIM, and he will **SEPARATE** people one from another *as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,* ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Ezekiel is one of two pastoral letters attributed to Paul in which he writes to his disciples and co-worker Timothy to give pastoral and theological advice. It's most likely written in the 2nd generation of the Church, when less people lived that had "known" Jesus or his first apostles. Epistles, or "letters" were a common, established literary form in the Roman Empire dating back to the Greek philosophers.

JUDGE :: שָׁפַט pronounced /shaphat/ :: meaning to judge, govern. As in deciding controversies and disagreements between parties; condemning and punishing

FAT AND LEAN SHEEP:: ἐπιφάνεια pronounced /epiphaneia/: meaning appearing, manifestation, glorious display. (epipháneia) is the root of the English term, "epiphany." This is the name we give to the Magi seeing the baby Jesus for who he truly was.

that day :: this language evokes the phrase "the day of the Lord" symbol and eschatological moment of God's judgement, or justice setting right the wrongs in the world. "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—" Joel 2:1. See also Isaiah 10:20; Hosea 1:5; & Amos 9:11. It was used at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On *that day* many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.'

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, '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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.' ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me 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 nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just 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.*"

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- How does that word that engaged you – touch your life in this scriptures?
- What advice to you hear Paul giving to Timothy? How is it helpful, appropriate, or “sound” for us today?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is the first of the four gospel retelling of the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Probably written with the intended audience of the church in the area we would call Lebanon and Syria today.

Chapter 25 is a series of teaching of Jesus using parables. Our selection today is the last in that series that is inter-connected.

SEPARATE ἀφορίζω pronounced /aphorizó/ :: meaning to mark off by boundaries from, set apart.

as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats :: This image also assumes the practice of keeping goats and sheep together in the same flock. These two animals are then separated just as wheat and chaff (Matthew 3:12), weeds and wheat (13:24-30) and types of fish (13:47-50). And the two men in the field, two women grinding wheat (24:36-25:30). Matthew (like the Hebrew Scriptures do) has already used the word sheep to designate disciples of Jesus (See Matthew 10:16; 18:12; 26:31).

ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE GATHERED BEFORE HIM :: this phrase and image is typical of eschatological scenes (representing the judgment of creation by God) throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. It gives us a signal of the context and intended teaching purpose of the parable. See for example "I am coming to gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and shall see my glory," - Isaiah 66:18
 "I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations." - Joel 3:2

eternal life :: in Greek the phrase is literally (life of the age [the new age of God's kingdom]) meaning maybe more about a life that participates in the full establishment of god's empire than living forever.