

Newsletter

22nd November 2020

Sunday's Reading Ephesians 1:15-23

Due to Covid restrictions there will be no church on Sunday 22 November or 29 November

Hopefully, we will be able to organise a Podcast on the church website. See "Sermons" at www.Naracoorteuca.org.au

Some Prayers of the people

- Please continue to pray for John & Dorothy Kester.
- Pray for the Christmas message as it is presented in the schools. May it sow seeds in the hearts of those who hear it. Pray for the presenters of this message that God will lead them and bless them.
- Please pray for the Russell family during this difficult time as they grieve for the passing of Denis' mother.
- Please pray for Sue Kuchel who is ill.

Notices

Please share your news points/concerns with us so we may pray or celebrate with you.

AGM will now be postponed

Nominations for elders to be elected at the AGM are Bob Kester and Joel Munro. Please pray about these nominations.

Provided that Covid Restrictions allow:

December 13th 12-2.30pm following the church service there will be a **Sunday School picnic** at Barnett's.

Please bring chairs, drinks, and a picnic lunch. 94 Wool wash Lane Stewarts Range

Men's Night has been postponed date to be advised

Christmas Hampers

The Combined Churches Christmas Hamper Committee is again busy preparing to provide food hampers to needy folk in our community so they can enjoy a Christmas meal.

We need donations of non-perishable food e.g. canned fruit or vegetables, Christmas puddings or tins of ham.

We have been providing hampers for nearly 30 years and last year we provided over 50 hampers.

You will find a box for donations in the foyer to Blackwell Hall. We depend on your help so we can help others. Thanks Jill D.

Midweek Bible Reading

Matthew 25:31-46

The Sheep and the Goats

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.”

This is a rather frightening passage of scripture. But what does it teach us?

Firstly, there will be a judgement of “the Nations”. The Nations in the language of the bible from the perspective of Jewish people to whom Jesus is talking, were not the Jewish people themselves, the people of God.

The Nations are all the other peoples. Lev 20:26 reads:

²⁶ You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

The parable is about how the people of the nations will be judged.

If we know ourselves as God’s people, true children of God because we have put our faith in Jesus Christ, then we have been judged already.

As Jesus tells us in John 4:24: “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life”.

Or as Paul tells us in Romans 8, verse 1: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death”.

The criteria for judgement of those who put their faith in Jesus Christ is simply that – belief, faith, trust. Having believed, we have crossed from death to life. It doesn’t stop there of course, the Holy Spirit who we receive and welcome into our lives will continue to transform our entire being, bringing us peace, but changing our life focus as well. We will not be bent inward any longer but look outward to God and to others. We are “in Christ Jesus” as Paul puts it.

The criterion for judgement is: - what is our attitude to Jesus Christ – do we welcome him?

But how are the Nations judged? How are those who are not Christians judged? What does Jesus tell us?

Jesus tells us, I think, that the criterion for judgement is exactly the same – what is the attitude of the people of the Nations to Jesus Christ?

Jesus identifies with his people. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. If it were not so, in a way that is so fundamental, then Christ could never have substituted himself for us in his sacrificial death on the cross.

Jesus took on our humanity, he was baptised in the Jordan for us, repenting of our sin, tempted for us, suffered, and died for us, in our place, and rose to life for us, and we rise with him. We are his brothers and sisters – his brethren – so when people of the Nations treat his Brethren well then, they treat him well. When the people of the Nations, treat his people badly, they reject him. And this is the basis of the Judgement - their attitude to Jesus Christ.

In the reading from Matthew Jesus the king turns to the sheep, the people on his right, and says:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

And it comes as a huge surprise to them because of course they don’t know Jesus. Remember, these are the Nations many of whom, in their lives, have not had a chance, a real chance, to know and accept Christ. They don’t know who he is.

It comes as a surprise both, to the sheep, who treat Jesus well, as they have encountered him in his people, and to the goats, who again don’t know Jesus, but treat him badly, as they find him in his brothers and sisters.

It is an attitude of the heart on which the Nations are judged. And it is an attitude that is then expressed in various ways.

Jesus, the righteous King says to those on his right:

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 ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

The attitude to Jesus Christ can’t be one of indifference – God expects that it will be an attitude of welcome and compassion for his people.

As is so often the case Jesus’ words echo Old Testament scripture. Listen to the prophet Isaiah chapter 58:6-7:

'Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –

when you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

When the people of the Nations do these kinds of things for Christ's brothers and Sisters, then they indeed turn to Christ himself – their own flesh and blood.

We don't know all the criteria by which people are ultimately judged, but in some way, it will be how they respond to Christ as they find him.

Paul writes in Romans 3:16-19:

¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

God looks at the heart.

Not only does God look at how we respond to the revelation of God that we have been given, but he even takes into account what might have been if the circumstances had been different. Hear what Jesus says in Matthew 11:20-24 concerning particular towns in Israel and other places:

'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.'

Which is suggestive of decision making at a level of justice that we cannot begin to imagine. The judgement made on Sodom was just, but it may have been different, and will be different, at least for some, on the day of judgement because they did not have an opportunity to know the truth. God looks at the heart.

In this Midweek Bible reading, Matthew says it 4 times in more or less the same words:

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 ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Clearly, we are not meant to forget it. The things listed are mostly not mandated by any law, they are actions undertaken voluntarily, out of conscience, out of love, out of a righteous heart.

And in this parable, they are good things done to, and for, representatives of Christ.

Elsewhere in Matthews Gospel Jesus makes the same point. In chapter 10, verses 40 to 42 he says:

⁴⁰ 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.'

Jesus is with his disciples and his missionaries. When Christians go out in Christ's name, they go out with Christ. Christ is with his people.

What are the options that all of us have? We can choose Christ and life, or we can intentionally or passively out of a hard, unloving heart, reject Christ as he reveals himself to us, through his word, through his Spirit, or in his people. In that case, in the case that we reject Christ, Christ will respect that wish.

In the judgement of the Sheep and the Goats those on the right enter an inheritance, a kingdom prepared for them since the creation of the world. They enter eternal life.

Those on the left are removed from God's presence. They are cursed, and they are forever dead. So, there is a judgement and a decision. And how could it be any other way?

In what sort of moral universe could evil ultimately triumph?

If we believe in a moral, righteous, God, how could it be any other way? Is it a loving thing that people, who intentionally set out to destroy and hurt and oppress, and remain unrepentant about that, in the end win?

We may use our freedom to act, and to not to believe and trust in Jesus Christ – a freedom he gives us as beings made in his image. Would God be God, if our freedom to act then results in unrepentant evil, and he in turn fails to act justly? Is that what some people call love? How is that different from hate?

But, still, it's a difficult thing.

Against this, we hope and trust in the one who gave his life for us, in an expression of his love for the whole world, because it is this divine human being who has earned the right to judge, and he judges perfectly, with mercy, and with love.

Pastor Andrew Everson