Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Christ the King Sunday (Proper 29) – November 22, 2026

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.

- Matthew 25:31-34 –

The parable of the sheep and the goats is initially terrifying since it pictures a final judgment seemingly based upon works, not grace. It seems that the righteous are saved by their good works while the unrighteous are damned for their evil ones. However, while this is true on the surface, there is an asymmetry of divine grace operating in the depths. The good works of the righteous are predestined by the Father, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and covered by the blood of the Son. By contrast, the unrighteous, having rejected the Son, are left to wander in their evil and their impotence.

First, Jesus says that the righteous are blessed by the Father to inherit a kingdom that has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world. From this statement, it logically follows that the Father has also prepared the righteous for this kingdom and has therefore prepared their good works in advance that they might walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). By contrast, the wicked are told to depart into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Second, the good works of the righteous are inspired by the Spirit and are thus spontaneous, not calculating. For this reason the righteous are surprised to learn that they were really serving Jesus through their good works. By contrast, it is the bad deeds of the unrighteous that are spontaneous while their ostensibly good deeds are calculating. This is why they are surprised to learn that their bad deeds were really directed against Christ the whole time. Had they seen Christ in their neighbor, they might have acted differently, albeit with a calculating intent.

Finally, because the righteous are united with Christ, they and their works are covered by his blood. On their own, their good deeds are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) before God. However, due to Christ’s blood atonement, their imperfectly motivated and improperly executed works are reckoned good by God. By contrast, since the unrighteous have no blood covering, their “good” deeds are evil, and their bad deeds are even worse.

So, what initially looks like a terrifying picture is actually laden with grace for God’s elect. As David walked with God through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4), so we too can stand at the final judgment, knowing that God is with and for us, not against us.

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