

# Christ the King Sunday, Year A

## Trusting and Serving Christ in Our Neighbor

Christ the King Sunday

Matthew 25:31-46

Analysis by Brad Haugen

31When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for 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, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." 37Then 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? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I 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.” 44Then 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?” 45Then 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.” 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.



*From Canva*

*“The crucified and risen Christ remains with “the least of these” who, it turns out, includes us as well.”*

## **Diagnosis: Short Sighted**

***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Widespread Division and Separation***

Our ears perk up as Jesus separates people from one another as “a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats...” (v. 32). We

see the widespread division and separation of people in our own world, of course. And our *modus operandi* is to align ourselves with the “right” side against those who are “wrong.” We each have our own schemes of separating and categorizing people, so that we can rationalize to ourselves and others why we are right and others are wrong. We draw our battle lines between “us” versus “them.” And however we may think we are making ourselves “right” by doing all the “right” things for those who are hungry, thirsty, needing clothing, imprisoned,” the truth is it’s all been about “us” – versus “them.”

### ***Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Cursed by What We Don’t See – Our Shortsightedness***

Yet we do not have eyes to see our Lord in the “the least of these.” We may even characterize “the least of these” among the “them” – who are, in our sense of rightness, not “us.” We define our own value and success by being more successful than other people, especially the people we consider “the least of these.” We are therefore alienated from the very people with whom Jesus identifies most. Still, seeking to justify ourselves before the Son of Man, the One who judges, we may ask: “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?” And the Son of Man 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.” (vv. 44-45). We don’t truly see him for we do not see “the least of these” as members of his family.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): The Accursed Departed***

And so because of “us” who do not see the Son of Man in the “least of these,” with our eyes curved in upon ourselves, we hear the final judgment from the Son of Man: “You that are accursed, depart from me...” (v. 41). The Son of Man, the Lord

and King, turns our judgment of others upon us, finally. And his final judgment is that we – “us” – are indeed separated from “them” – “the least of these” in our neighbor in need as well as from himself – eternally. Just as we wanted it in all our separations.



*From Canva*

## **Prognosis: Blessed by Christ in Our Neighbor**

***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): No Longer Accursed Nor Departed***

Yet, as it turns out, the Son of Man, the King and Lord in final judgment, is none other than Jesus who takes our separation upon himself, becoming accursed himself on the cross for us. He is

the One whom God has sent for the damnable “us” who can’t see him in “the least of these” with whom he identifies, nor able to recognize him as God’s Son, the Christ, as he is crucified, accursed upon that cross. After all, while dying on a cross, Jesus has become the least of the least, one forsaken by God, the farthest thing in our minds from God.

But the crucified Christ didn’t want us to be accursed. So, he bore the curse of God-forsakenness on the cross in our place instead. His promise that the righteous will go away into eternal life was fulfilled when God raised his Son from the dead. Since Christ is risen and remains with us accursed ones, he sets us free from the curse that would otherwise separate us from him.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Righteous by Faith – Seeing is Believing***

The crucified and risen Christ remains with “the least of these” who, it turns out, includes us as well. No longer separated from Jesus, we see differently. When we look at others, all others – particularly those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned, and strangers – we no longer see them as lesser than ourselves. Indeed, we see Christ in all of humanity, for whom he was crucified and raised, and through Whom there is no longer “us” and “them.” Rather, we trust that we will encounter Christ in them.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Gracious Invitation and Welcome***

Better yet, we trust that we, along with others, will be serving Christ himself by developing relationships with people who are different from ourselves, no longer considered “the least of these.” Through our relationships with others, Christ will see to it that people’s hunger and thirst – as well as their need

for healing, wellbeing, and belonging – are addressed more adequately. The righteousness (right relationships) of caring for one another in community comes from faith: our trusting that we will encounter Christ wherever there are opportunities to serve our neighbor in need.

The invitation of Christ, crucified and risen for us, will be the invitation we extend to others. “Come, you that are blessed...” (v. 34). Jesus invites and welcomes all who are no longer accursed, cast out, or separated from him. Rather than reinforce or contribute to the widespread division and separation in our world, we bless those whom Christ already blesses. “Come, you that are blessed by God.” We extend a gracious invitation and welcome to people across what we now see as divisions of inequality. After all, wherever the “least of these” are no longer identified as such, but rather loved, honored, served, and welcomed, is where Christ is.