

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 9 February 2025

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 105:1-3

Opening Psalm: 100A Shout to the LORD, All Earth

Confession of Sin

Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Colossians 1:11-14

Hymn of Preparation: 230 Holy, Holy, Holy!

Old Covenant Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-24

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Sermon Title: *At the End of the Age*

Hymn of Response: 389 Great God, What Do I See and Hear!

Confession of Faith: Nicene Creed (p. 852)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Hymn: 212 Come, Thou Almighty King

PM Worship

451 Approach, My Soul, the Mercy Seat

121A I Lift My Eyes Up to the Hills

520 What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 121:1-8

New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

Sermon Title: *Access to Heavenly Grace for Life on Earth*

Adult Sunday School – *The Promise of the Future: A Study in Eschatology*

Suggested Preparations

Monday (2/3) Read and discuss Matthew 25:31–46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 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. 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, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will

answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

“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. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 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.’ 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?’ 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.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (ESV)

The second great commandment is that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. This comes to a particular focus in helping our neighbors who are in deep need. When Jesus was asked the question, “Who is my neighbor?” He told the parable of the good Samaritan as His answer. It is therefore vital for us to love our neighbors without any regard for their relationship with us, their ethnicity, or their religion. Nevertheless, that is NOT what the above verses are about.

As Jeffrey Gibbs points out:

First and most importantly, Jesus never identifies Himself with needy people in general or refers to them as His brothers (or true family). To the contrary, when Jesus does identify with people and refers to them as His brothers or true family, it is always His disciples with whom He identifies. ... For now, simply recall 12:46-50, especially Jesus words in 12:49-50 in answer to His own question, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?”

And when He had stretched out His hand over His disciples, He said: “Look my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven – *he* is my brother and sister and mother.

This sense of “brother” is completely typical. A strong case can be made that every figurative or metaphorical use of “brother” in Matthew refers to a disciple of Jesus. Even when Jesus speaks of receiving Him by receiving a child, this happens “in [His] name,” that is, because such children are little ones “who believe in” Jesus (18:6).

Second, the idea that Jesus would place at the front and center of His teaching an admonition to care for the needy in general finds little support anywhere in Matthew. He never says such a thing. ... The Israelites, to be sure, were to care for the widow and the orphan and the sojourner in their

midst. Christians are to do good to all people, even their enemies. The notion, however, that the central manifestation of Christian duty and love is to provide for the physical needs of the world (including the needs of non-disciples of Jesus) is not to be found in either testament.

What Jesus is teaching in this passage is how fully He identifies with His people. We cannot be for Christ and against His Church. There is perhaps a particular connection in this passage to be made with Christians as those who bring the gospel to others. To reject the messenger is to reject the Christ who sent them. To embrace the messenger (as He or she is bringing the good news) is to receive the Christ who sent them.

Read or sing Psalm 100A Shout to the LORD, All Earth

Tuesday (2/4) Read and discuss Matthew 25:14–30

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (ESV)

David Strain comments:

Look at what the master says, “You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.” Excuses won’t do, do you see, when the master comes home. A

heart that reveres Him, works for Him. A life that trusts Christ, serves His cause. If there is no interest earned on the capital invested, we're revealed for the traitors we really are, actually serving ourselves, not our Master, not our Savior. And so in the end, the faithless slave is stripped of even the little that he enjoys and he is cast, verse 30, "into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." You can surround your life with all the religion you like. You can read the best books. You can learn your catechism. You can sing the hymns of the faith with gusto. You can become a connoisseur of the best preaching and educate your palate to prefer the most rarified Reformed theology. But if there is no real fruit, there has been no real faith and there will be no future for you. If there is no profit, then privileges notwithstanding, there will be no paradise. If there is no holiness, there will be no heaven.

Remember the riches of Gospel privilege, embrace the promise of generous reward, and flee the certainty of coming wrath. I am persuaded that hell will be populated by surprised church-goers who thought themselves safe because they buried their talent until the Master came home. Will you have a return on the Master's investment to show for all His investment, the great riches He's lavished upon you? Will you believe the Gospel or will you leave it all as an external thing? Will there be fruit? Will there be a return? Will there be evidence that you are indeed a good and faithful servant?

Read or sing Hymn 230 Holy, Holy, Holy!

Wednesday (2/5) Read and discuss Ezekiel 34:11–24

"For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 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. 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. 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. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. 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.

"As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. 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. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken. (ESV)

Iain Duguid writes:

Jesus not merely the model shepherd who makes contemporary pastors feel guilty by how far short we fall. He is Himself the One of whom Ezekiel 34 speaks. He is the One in whom all the covenants of the Old Testament find their fulfillment. He is the ultimate Shepherd-King, who fulfills the Davidic covenant, as the crowds recognized during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He fulfills the Mosaic covenant both as the Lawgiver, who speaks His authoritative word from the mountain, and also as the One who has come to fulfill the law given from Sinai. He is the Second Adam, who through His obedient life, death, and resurrection fulfills the covenant of creation (1 Cor 15:45-49). He is the One who ushers in for His people the blessings of the covenant by being the covenant-keeper in our place. In Him, we have peace with God, in Him, we have peace with one another; in Him, all creation finds peace.

All of these blessings have both a “now” and a “not yet” aspect to them. WE see them in part now, but we do not yet see them in all their fullness. Creation still groans with anticipation as it awaits the revelation of the new heavens and the new earth and of ourselves as sons and daughters of God (Rom 8:19-23). In the meantime our experience frequently continues to be “trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword.” But these are momentary light afflictions in comparison to the glory that awaits us. One day Christ will return, and all will be gloriously fulfilled as God gathers His worldwide flock from many nations into His presence. Then there will be no more suffering, no more pain, no more disharmony with God, my neighbor, or the world. As Revelation 7:17 puts it:

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd.
He will lead them to springs of living water.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Read or sing Hymn 389 Great God, What Do I See and Hear!

Thursday (2/6) Read and discuss Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,

who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore. (ESV)

Allen P. Ross writes:

The theme of the psalm is divine protection, even though the passage does not clarify how God will do this. The message is that the pilgrim, the true worshiper who is obeying the LORD's word and making his way to the sanctuary to appear before the LORD and to praise Him for His many benefits, may have confidence that the LORD will see him safely there and back – and in all activities of life. The [central] idea is: *Believers may confidently trust in the LORD to protect them in their spiritual journey.* ... Believers in their spiritual activities will build their confidence through prayer over their concerns and with the help of words of assurance from the LORD, both in His written word and through other believers. This assurance of the LORD's protective presence does not mean that life will be free of danger or difficulty; rather, believers will be protected throughout the struggles of life. In fact, the use of this psalm in Israel's pilgrimages to the holy city as well as my corresponding wording for its use in our spiritual journeys limits the application. It is when believers are obeying God in their activities that they can be confident in praying for His protection. But assurance of divine protection cannot be expected when people live in disobedience.

The New Testament reiterates the truth of the divine presence protecting faithful believers where ever they go (Matt. 28:20; Rom. 8:37-39). We read that the LORD is with us, from now to eternity; He will never leave us nor forsake us as we make our journey through life to the presence of the LORD.

Friday (2/7) Read and discuss Hebrews 4:14–16

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (ESV)

R. Kent Hughes writes:

To dramatize the greatness of Christ's priestly ministry, the author contrasts it with the ministry of the Levitical high priest who once a year passed from the sight of the people into the Holy of Holies bearing the blood of atonement. In contrast, Jesus, our high priest, passed once for all from the sight of His people at the Ascension to the ultimate Holy of Holies, having shed His own atoning blood. Specifically, the contrast becomes clear as we reflect on the temporal and circumscribed nature of the high priest's work. Once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the high priest, representing all the people, entered the Holy of Holies, where he sprinkled blood on the mercy-seat to symbolically atone for all the sins of the people. But even before doing this, he had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins. And then when he entered the Holy of Holies he only stayed long enough to sprinkle the atoning blood. In fact, bells were sewn to the hem of his robe so the people outside could hear him moving and thus know that God had not struck him dead.

His entrance into the Holy of Holies was through three portals. First, he bore the blood through the door into the outer court. Second, he entered another door into the Holy Place. And third, he entered through the veil of the Holy of Holies. Thus, the ancient high priest had a three-portaled entrance in coming before the thrice-holy God – and he had to do it year after year.

On the other hand, Jesus, our great high priest, after His once-only sacrifice for sins on the cross, passed "through the heavens" – going through the first heaven (the atmosphere), the second heaven (outer space), and finally into the third heaven (the most holy of all places, the presence of God). And there He sat down (something no high priest had ever done!) because His atoning work was finished. He remains at God's right hand, making intercession for us.

The grand and great point of this for the author's Jewish hearers is the overarching superiority of Jesus, their great high priest. Their preacher-writer-friend knew that amidst the rising troubles, some of them would, no doubt, look back through rose-colored glasses to the Levitical system, over imagining the comfort of having priestly mediation, and some would be in danger of being sucked back into the system. To such, this strong teaching was the antidote. There is simply no contest between the Levitical system and what is provided in Christ!

Read or sing Hymn 212 Come, Thou Almighty King

Saturday (2/8) Read and discuss Matthew 25:31–46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 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. 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, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

“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. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 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.’ 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?’ 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.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (ESV)

R.T. France writes:

The recipients of the acts of kindness are Jesus’ “smallest brothers and sisters,” and what is done to them is done to Him (v. 40). So is the final judgment concerned not with response to human need in general, but to the need of disciples in particular, and thus indirectly with how people have responded to Jesus Himself in the person of His earthly representatives? Has their response to disciples in need been their way of “acknowledging Jesus,” which was presented as the basis of judgment in 10:32-33? That interpretation has a firm foundation in the earlier language of this gospel, which has spoken of true disciples as Jesus’ brothers and sisters and has used the phrase “these little ones” to denote members of the disciple community. In 18:5 we have been told that to welcome one such child in Jesus’ name is to welcome Him, and that child becomes the basis for the phrase “these little ones” in the following verses. Several go further and argue that these “smallest brothers and sisters” of Jesus are not just any disciples, but those sent out as missionaries of the good news; in that case people’s response to them would be a measure of their response to the gospel. But this more specific identification, while clearly consonant with the theme of the mission discourse in chapter 10, is not required by the

wording of this passage: “of these my smallest brothers and sisters” sounds like an inclusive term for any disciple, however insignificant, and we shall note below that the hardships they suffer are not peculiar to missionaries.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow’s morning and evening worship services.