

## Did Matthew Get This Right?

Sermon Notes for Nov 26, 2017 at Brentwood

Ps 100 (541) & Matthew 25:31-46 (906)



**And these will go away into eternal  
punishment, but the righteous  
into eternal life.  
(Matt 25:46)**



### Provocative Ponderings that Call Forth Our Potential in Christ

Here's my struggle with this story – the struggle that led to the question in the sermon title – are we met in worship services like this, and in other places where God encounters us, by a God of rejection or acceptance? – is the God who is revealed in Jesus, the Christ - an angry Judge or a forgiving Parent? – if the former, then we should have no difficulty with Matthew's take on this story – if the latter, then perhaps the parable of the Prodigal Son (recorded only in Luke's gospel, interestingly enough) suggests that Matthew is misguided in this thinking – indeed, Matthew's own recording of Jesus' teachings earlier in the Sermon on the Mount suggests a God who challenges with patient compassion rather than a God who condemns with eternal rejection

Here's the crucial consideration I was provoked to ponder this week:

- Our initial focus, however difficult at times it is for us to get to this perspective, is on what God is doing with and for his beloved human beings through the whole of the Scriptures – what is God's desire, God's intent, God's aspiration? – there is judgment in the Scriptures – but, especially in the accounts of God among us in Jesus, the Christ, the Living Word that is definitive for our understanding of all of Scripture, judgement is always and simultaneously accompanied by redemption – by acceptance and forgiveness – why one of the key thought-leaders among Canadian Presbyterians, Walter Bryden, always talked about the Judging/Saving Word who was Jesus Christ -

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there is a whole psychology/sociology/theology that has been loudly and endlessly debated within the church, but it seems to me that it boils down to how people change – do you threaten, demand, and condemn them or do you welcome, invite, and forgive them? – and where does our own reformation and transformation come into the picture, our own admission of having had it wrong for all these years? – that needs to be on the table as an option if we are to follow Micah’s invitation to do justice, love kindness, and walk *humbly* with our God – that may mean, as we pray this through, that ‘eternal’ as the Greek is translated in this passage, is not so much a length of time as a quality of relationship – refuse to treat people well in every dimension of your circles of influence and you will remain in the darkness and desolation of separation from God – that is not God’s will – God’s has already rendered you righteous in Jesus Christ – but you must accept the invitation and come home – and, as we all know in the depths of our beings, accepting the wonders of this welcome is not easy – it turns so many of the assumptions that we make about life and goodness upside down

### **So, what are we going to do with this ...**

I may be wrong on this – that’s why I hope we keep exploring what the Scriptures say on this issue of judgement and eternal separation from God - but as we do, I hope we come to respect the long-standing traditions within the Presbyterian/Reformed approach to the Christian faith that seek to understand what the whole witness of the Scriptures is saying about such crucial matters – it is not good enough to pick words from this section of Scriptures or that – the Scriptures, though inspired by the Spirit of God, were written by humans to confront and comfort human conditions with the will and workings of God – a God who desires, in the end, a loving reconciliation of the whole of creation with the community of the Trinity

### **Your Notes ...**

### **A Framework for our Prayers**

Our thanks for your reconciling love may be fumbling and frail, but we do catch glimpses of the ways you infuse our daily lives with the welcoming wonders of your grace. Draw those every more clearly to our attention this coming week. ...

And perhaps in our prayers this week you will lead us to listen more deeply and accept more fully the richness of the forgiveness that you have given to us in Jesus, your Christ. Convince us that this gift is real, that it is ours, and that it energizes a whole new way of being in and for the world. ...

You have welcomed us in worship this morning with the wonders of you unconditional and steadfast love. You have provoked our reflections on the righteousness that you gave as gift in Jesus Christ. Now go with us into your world with that wisdom to witness to its transforming power. ...

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