

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*November 15, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After hearing of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. in Chapter 33, Ezekiel's message turns to the promise of restoration under the Lordship of God as the true Shepherd. The role of God as the shepherd goes back to Jacob's description of God as his shepherd (Genesis 48:15 and 49:24) David picks up on this them in Psalm 80 and most famously in Psalm 23. Ezekiel writes that God will replace the shepherds of Israel who lead their people to captivity due to their greed. God, however, will not excuse the greed of the sheep but will judge the herd as well. (See Jeremiah 23:1-5) Those who pass judgment will be led by one shepherd of the line of David. (See Isaiah 40:10-11) In John 10, Jesus claims this role as the Good Shepherd. Jesus will also judge one day the herd (see Matthew 25:31-46 below)

Ezekiel 34:20 I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.

What does it mean to be a "fat" sheep in this text? Is it good or bad?

If the sheep are fat from stealing from the lean, what does that say about society?

Are you "fat" or "lean"? Do you take or do you serve?

Does this change how you view the "good" shepherd?

## **Commentary on Matthew 25:14–30** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The parable of the talents occurs in only Matthew and Luke (19:11-27). In Luke's version, it is made clear that the master is going to a far country to receive a kingdom (heaven) and he leaves instructions to "trade with these til I come". Matthew has no such instructions and not only is the one talent taken away but the individual is cast "into the outer darkness". The severity of the punishment provides a link to other parables in Matthew that help illuminate the point of the parable. The gnashing of teeth occurs once in the Luke (13:28) and six times in Matthew: lack of faith (8:10-12); parable of the weeds (13:36-42); parable of the fish (13:47-50); wedding banquet (22:2-13); lazy servant (24:45-51). While the parable of the fish may seem arbitrary sense the fish can not help if it was born "good" to eat or "bad", the parable of the weeds and wheat point toward judgment based on the fruit produced. This fruit is referred to in the abstract as the wedding garment, but the lazy servant and in light of the centurion's faith the fruit is faithfulness to the will of God. It is the will of God that the gifts and "talents" the children of God have been given be used for the care of God's creation and to the glory of God and not self. Burying the talent is using God's gifts solely for the purpose of self gratification. It is for this reason of selfishness that the slave with one talent is not only stripped of the talent but thrown into darkness.

Matthew 25:29 For to all those who have, more will be given but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

What is being given or taken? Material possessions or grace?

If our gifts are given for God's glory, than is our greatest gift the love of Christ?

Do we bury that love like an insurance policy or do we share that love?

If we fail to have love for others, do we close ourselves off to the love given by others?

Is that what is given and taken - love?

Does it mean that the more love we give then the more we receive and the less we give then the less we receive?

## **Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Paul's encouragement should be read against the scene described in Isaiah 59. Sin has created a barrier between humanity and God. "Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us; we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness; and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope like the blind along a wall, groping like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among the vigorous as though we were dead." (9-10) Paul, however, says that because of Christ, "you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness." It is Jesus who put on the breastplate and helmet as foretold by Isaiah "He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle." (16-17). As followers of Jesus, Paul says, "let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation." It is by being in Christ that we are protected by *his* breastplate and *his* helmet.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

What does it mean to walk in the light where secrets cannot hide?

Is your life an open book or are there still chapters you wish to keep closed?

Does being awake mean opening our eyes to the truth about everything including ourselves?

Once we strip away all of our pretentiousness what is left? Is this why we need armor?

## **Sermon "Step Into the Light"** ([Sermon Video](#))

How often do we find ourselves in the "land of confusion"? Just when it seems like everything is beginning to make sense, everything changes. We romanticize the past and paint everything as being perfect and rosy but the truth is we were as confused then as we are now. The only difference is with hindsight we can see the good rather than the chaos. Isaiah put it this way, "We grope like the blind along a wall, groping like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight". It is hard to get our bearings when everything seems dark and confusing.

Isaiah argues that this state of confusion is the result of sin experienced by every generation. Like a thicket, sin grows so high and so thick that the light of God is distorted and obscured. We stumble in the darkness of our own creation. Ezekiel blames the leaders and their greed for the scattering of the sheep. The said truth is that the leaders were simply the blind leading the blind. Their own sin caused them to mislead themselves and those they were supposed to shepherd. They were bad shepherds because they themselves lived in the land of confusion. Only the true light of God can break through the thicket and dispel our confusion.

In our confusion, we take the gifts of the Holy Spirit and selfishness hide them. Confusion and darkness only enhances our tendency toward survival and selfishness. Rather than sharing our faith, hope, and love, we hoard them like starving people in a prison camp. The darkness and confusion convince us that we live in a world of scarcity rather than abundance. That love and hope are too precious to give away but must be guarded in our hearts. Christ, however, did not die so that we might selfishly hoard his love for ourselves. He tells the disciples to get out of their locked rooms and go into the world sharing his gifts. For the more we share, the more we will discover that we have. But for those who hoard the gifts of the Spirit, even what they have will die because the gifts are meant to thrive in the light not die in the dark.

When the children of God begin to share their gifts, lights begin to appear in the darkness and understanding penetrates the land of confusion. The more people share the hope they have in Christ, the more our community and world begins to act out of a sense of hope and not despair. The more we share our faith, the voices of doubt and conspiracy begin to lose their grasp. And if we all invest at least the one talent of love, fear will no longer have the power to control our society.

We can not do this by our own power or grace. The gifts we have are there because we live in Christ. It is Christ who wears the breastplate of faith and love. It is Christ who wears the helmet of salvation. When we live in Christ, we put on that breastplate and helmet. When we live in Christ, we live in light and understanding. When we live in the world, we step back into the darkness and confusion where the breastplate and helmet no longer protect us.

If we want to leave the confusion and darkness of the world, we must step into the light and follow Jesus. When Jesus is the Lord of our life, we find ourselves led by the Good Shepherd. He not only gives us the gifts of the Holy Spirit but shows us when and where to invest these gifts so that God's kingdom may break forth. With his breastplate and helmet, no force in heaven or on earth can drag us back into the land of darkness, fear, confusion, and doubt. By following Jesus, we step into the light.