

I.N.I.

Twenty-fourth (Last) Sunday after Pentecost
November 23, 2014
Matthew 25:31-46

In Christ Jesus, who shall appear in all His glory and might on that great and final day to judge both the living and the dead, the believers and the unbelievers, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Can you think of any other time that is as gloomy and as glorious; as fearful and as fantastic; as terrifying and as terrific as Judgment Day? For that day is indeed gloomy, fearful and terrifying to the unbeliever, but glorious, fantastic and terrific for the believer. And yet all those words and terms still fall miserably short of what it really will be like for both the believer in Christ and the one who has rejected Christ. For the unbeliever it will be the most horrifying event ever, but for the believer it will be the most ecstatic, joyful event ever.

Our text this morning is the conclusion of Jesus' long answer to His disciples' question: **"TELL US, WHEN THESE THINGS WILL BE? AND WHAT *WILL BE* THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING, AND OF THE END OF THE AGE?"** That question is recorded back in chapter 24, verse 3.

Now Jesus is ready to lay out before His disciples' eyes and our eyes the sequence of events and the words that will be said when He finally does come again on that Last Day of Judgment. Amazing that He tells us exactly what to expect so that we will not be worried, surprised or unprepared; but eager with joy and anticipation!

Jesus calls Himself by the name that He used most often to describe Himself—The Son of Man. Once He came to this earth in humility as a human being---born in a stable in Bethlehem, riding on a donkey into Jerusalem, dying on the cross on Calvary. Then He rose in majesty and ascended into heaven to rule all things. Today He comes in grace and power through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. But there will be a day when He will come again as the Judge of all. We state that belief every time we recite the Apostles' Creed. And that is our theme for this morning:

HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

I: Judge Jesus will come in glory for final judgment.

Jesus will come as the glorified and ascended Lord of all creation. He tells us in our text that He will **COME IN HIS GLORY, AND ALL THE HOLY ANGELS WITH HIM, THEN HE WILL SIT ON THE THRONE OF HIS GLORY.** What an amazing picture. It is more than our mind's eye can even imagine. The all-powerful Lord will come down from heaven, with an unnumbered amount of heavenly angels around Him, sitting on His throne in heavenly glory. And He will gather around Him **ALL THE NATIONS.** Every single person ever conceived from the conception and birth of Cain until the last conception, whenever that is, will be gathered before the Judge.

Then the Judge will act like the Shepherd that He also is, and separate all the people of this world into two groups—sheep and goats. The sheep—those who have been led to repent of their sins and believe in Him as their Savior will be on His right, while those who rejected Him as their Lord and Savior will be gathered on His left.

Had Jesus not told us this we would never believe that it could happen. Every person, yes! Not one missing, no! All the people on a round globe of earth gathered together before the Lord of all at one time. It is mystifying, yet true. It will not be a mess of chaos and disorder, but one of order and organization. It will be a time when Paul's words from Phil. 2 will be fulfilled: **AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, OF THOSE IN HEAVEN, AND OF THOSE ON EARTH, AND OF THOSE UNDER THE EARTH, AND *THAT* EVERY TONGUE SHOULD CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER.** This gathering of the sheep and the separation of the goats is the ultimate, final act of the Lord's grace in action as He guarantees that not one of those whom the Father has chosen to receive eternal life shall be lost.

That brings us to our second point:

II: Judge Jesus will give the final judgment based on the evidence of faith-filled works.

In the kindest possible words of pure grace, Judge Jesus will say to the sheep on His right: **'COME, YOU BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.'**

These believers in Christ are now inheritors of God's kingdom. They will reign with Christ and be a kingdom of priests and kings who will serve God forever in heaven.

Since this is a public declaration by the Judge, evidence must be presented for His decree. This evidence must support the Judge's verdict. Jesus gives us a partial listing of the evidence. Six works or actions are listed: feeding the hungry; giving drink to the thirsty; caring for a stranger; clothing those who need clothes; looking after the sick; and visiting those in prison. These six actions are concrete examples of the works of believers. It is not the works that saved them, but the faith in Jesus that performed these works. These works only attest to the fact that they were done out of living faith, for they were done *for Jesus*. James writes: **THUS ALSO FAITH BY ITSELF, IF IT DOES NOT HAVE WORKS, IS DEAD.**

Notice Judge Jesus calls the sheep, the righteous. They are righteous, not because of their works, but because of what He did for them. Not one single sin is mentioned or listed. They have all been removed, cast away, the punishment for them has been paid by Jesus. The sheep have been justified freely by His grace through His shed blood. This redemption is so perfect and so complete that God the Father has been reconciled with them. He no longer counts their sins against them, and in fact sees only Christ's righteousness in them. Their good works follow them to heaven as proof of the faith that was in their hearts. Remember entrance into God's kingdom of heaven is an inheritance, that is, God's free gift to them, by faith in their Savior Jesus, not something earned or deserved.

We note the humility and selflessness of these righteous. They look upon themselves as unworthy of this praise. They know their sins. They know their hearts. They know that by themselves their thoughts, words and deeds are corrupt and abominable. But the works they did for others, were done out of love for Jesus, in thanksgiving for His great sacrifice for them. They were not done to win or earn Jesus' favor, they already had His love and that is why Jesus says **'ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, INASMUCH AS YOU DID IT TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN, YOU DID IT TO ME.'**

Judge Jesus now turns to those on His left. He speaks similar words, but with completely different results. He talks about the same works, but these the unbelievers did not do. Again this is not an exhaustive list but a concrete example of those works that they did not do out of faith. These are only the sins of omission—things they failed to do out of love for Jesus. The Lord does not list all of the sins of commission—thoughts, words and actions that were immoral, ungodly and hurtful to others.

Notice the difference in their response from the response of the righteous. These cursed ones are not humble, not contrite; no tears of repentance fill their eyes and hearts, no plea for mercy is given. It is too late for that. They are argumentative, bitter and self-righteous: **'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?'** In other words, "Had we only known You wanted us to do these things we would have done them. You miss-judge us!"

Judge Jesus will have none of this. The time of grace is over—Judgment has arrived. The worst words anyone will ever hear then will be spoken to these unbelievers: **'DEPART FROM ME, YOU CURSED, INTO THE EVERLASTING FIRE PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.'** One shudders just reading these words. **'DEPART FROM ME'**—that is utter and total separation from God.

Hell does exist. It was created for Satan and all of the evil angels who followed him in his rebellion. It was not intended for God's greatest creature—mankind. It was a place of torment and eternal punishment for the evil angels.

For the people of this world, God planned their rescue and sent His Son. But for those who reject that rescue, that salvation, that deliverance, there is only hell. They bring this punishment upon themselves. Again the verdict is based upon the evidence of works. This time faithless works.

A few years ago a humanist organization in Washington, D.C. put out ads on the side of buses that said: "Why do we need a god? Just be good for goodness sake," with a picture of someone

dressed in a Santa Claus outfit. The head of the humanist organization that put out the ad was interviewed and said that many atheists and agnostics are good, moral people but that they are kind of lonely at this time of the year. So he is encouraging them to gather together and celebrate this time of the year just by being good for goodness sake. The man clearly stated that he did not believe God exists. The reporter said something to the effect that he hoped the man was not wrong in the end and the man arrogantly, boldly declared, "I'm not worried!"

This man will probably "do good for goodness sake" and he may visit the sick, help the poor, cloth the needy, feed the hungry and he may die not worried, but he will find out on Judgment Day that his whole life was a waste of time and energy because he did not know Jesus. He, together with all those who reject Jesus as Lord and Savior, by either believing in false gods or no god will be faced with the eternal punishment of hell.

It almost makes one sick to our stomachs to think of the countless millions upon millions who will suffer eternally when there is no need for them to do so. Christ has come. Christ has lived and died for ALL. Salvation has been accomplished. Sins have been forgiven for God loved the world and gave His Son. All sinners have been redeemed; the whole world of mankind has been saved. That is the message we need to get out to more and more people.

We may feel terribly inadequate as Christians to perform these works mentioned by Jesus and we often fail to do them. What a blessing that our Judge is also our loving Savior Shepherd who says to us, **'BE OF GOOD CHEER, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN YOU...(NOW) COME, YOU BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD:'** for the believer in Jesus, the ones who have been declared righteous through faith in Christ will have eternal life.

Amen.