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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 12, 2017
23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Daniel 7:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Hymns: 246; 611; 608; 410

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy 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 them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. ³³And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of 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 drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink?

³⁸When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? ³⁹Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to *You*?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’

⁴¹“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting 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 no drink; ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they also will answer Him, 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?’ ⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Judgment Day

Our epistle spoke of the coming judgment in terms of a thief in the night, that it will sneak up on the world and catch people by complete surprise. Our epistle lesson also said that the coming judgment should *not* take us by surprise when it comes. We should be ready, living in watchfulness. That depends on a couple of factors. One is our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is a great blessing that we, by the gracious and powerful working of the Holy Spirit, know Jesus to be both our Savior and our Lord. So in that way we are indeed prepared for the coming judgment.

The second point is that we actually think about the coming of the judgment, that it is real for us. This is our warning from Jesus, our wake-up call. There will be a judgment and it is coming. We can get so caught up in the business and busy-ness of everyday life that this most important event still coming in the history of the world, indeed the event that will conclude this world’s history seems at best very distant, and at worst we relegate its impact on our lives to almost fiction.

Jesus’ disciples asked about the end of the age of this earth and in His answer Jesus told them about --

THEME: The Final Judgment.

One of the significant facts of the coming Final Judgment is found in the Judge Himself. Jesus reveals that –

I. The Son of Man Judges the Nations.

The opening verses of our text are all too often gone over quickly, as if we already know this and don't need to remind ourselves of the significance of these glorious truths.

Matthew 25:31-33 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. ³³ And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.”

Jesus is telling us that He will be the one who judges the earth on the last day in the final judgment. He is unequivocal about this. Earlier in His ministry He taught the disciples this same truth. We read Jesus' words recorded in --

John 5:22-23 “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

All judgment has been committed or entrusted to the Son. That begs the question, “Why?” and Jesus gave the reason in that same passage; “*that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.*” The Son is God, equal with the Father. If one does not honor the Son one is not worshiping the true God, and one will be lost. This truth is vital to our salvation. In our text Jesus made a point of referring to Himself as the Son of Man. This is a title for the Messiah, a title that emphasizes Jesus' true humanity. The Son of God came down to earth to be our Brother, to be one of us, to secure our righteousness with His holy sinless life, bearing our sin in His bitter sufferings and death. Having secured our salvation by --
Philippians 2:8-11 “*becoming* obedient unto death even the death of the cross, ... God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth,

and of those under the earth,¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Son of Man, our Brother and our Redeemer Lord, shall return again in glory with all His holy angels, and every knee shall bow before Him, and every tongue shall confess His name to the glory of God the Father.”

That sets the scene, it will be glorious beyond words, and all the nations shall be gathered before the Judge, our Savior Jesus Christ. Of course there are things too magnificent for us to grasp now, like how all the nations shall be gathered before Him and all see Him at the same time. This includes all people from the beginning of the world until that last day. We are taught by Jesus in the parable of the tares among the wheat that the glory of the angels shall be more than just show. Jesus explained that parable saying, “*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness.*” (Matthew 13:41).

Yes there will be a sorting out, a separating of the peoples of this earth into two separate groups. It will happen under Jesus’ direction. He will sort the people of this earth as He sees them, as He sees their hearts. Our text say it will be like a shepherd sorting his sheep from his goats. A shepherd can easily sort the sheep from the goats and direct them into their separate pens. He will not mistake a goat for a sheep. He will not accidentally put one of his sheep in with the goats. Even we could do that with sheep and goats, but maybe not so much with people. While man is limited to seeing the outward appearance, “*the Lord looks at the heart.*” (1 Samuel 16:7) Jesus knows the heart of every man. He knows which people are sheep to be directed to His right and which people are goats to be directed to His left.

And then the Lord pronounces judgment:

II. Judgment Backed by Irrefutable Evidence.

Jesus begins His pronouncement of judgment with those on His right hand.

Matthew 25:34-36 “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of 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 drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’”

Please note that it is Christ the King who pronounces judgment on all nations. He calls those on His right hand “*blessed of My Father.*” This is significant to the pronouncement that follows. This references the grace that was given, the grace of salvation, the grace of forgiveness of sins, the grace that declares them righteous before God, the grace that called them to faith, the grace that now receives them to glory. How blessed we are that this grace has come to you and me!

Jesus invites these on His right hand to enter into that glory which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world. It was prepared for them before they were born and yet Jesus directs His attention to the evidence of their lives to substantiate that His pronouncement of judgment to eternal life is the right and proper one. Jesus’ judgment is irrefutable.

Now, what is interesting is the response of the righteous, and they are righteous but not because of these works which Jesus cites, they are righteous by Jesus’ merits, they are righteous by God’s decree, they are righteous and live by faith! What we see next is a response of the faith of the child of God. They are dumbfounded by Jesus’ cited evidence of righteousness. They ask, “When did we see you in one of those unfortunate circumstances and minister to you?” The righteous see themselves as being **unworthy** of salvation, unworthy of any reward, great or small. The righteous declare with humility Jesus’ words of counsel, “*We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.*” (Luke 17:10) May the Spirit always instill such humility and willing service in our hearts and lives. We have nothing of which to boast other than to boast of our Crucified and Risen Savior. We have been saved by grace and grace alone. It was by grace that we were called to faith. We are His workmanship, not our own. Our new man was created to serve Jesus with good works, works which God

prepared beforehand laying them out before us in our lives that we might walk in them.(Ephesians 2:8-10) Truly, “*We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.*” But Jesus declares, “Inasmuch as you did *it* to **one** of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.” (v.40) Since we are saved by grace and not by works of the law Jesus need only point to ONE fruit of faith and love to substantiate his judgment.

Then the Lord Jesus turns His attention to those on His left hand. His words are terrifying, “*Depart from me you cursed.*” Cursed by sin, cursed by death, cursed to hear the pronouncement of Jesus’ judgment that they are banned from His presence forevermore. Thrown out from the presence of the Lord; nothing could be worse than to hear the Lord say “*Depart from me you cursed,*” except for the words that follow, “*into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*” People get caught up in the word fire. Is it literal fire or is it figurative fire? It is as if you might moderate the horror a little if it is merely figurative fire. Don’t moderate the horror. This is horror of horrors, horror unknown in this world. To be cast into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels is something one should not wish on his worst enemy. In fact it is not something the Lord desires for anyone. One must notice that that while the righteousness were invited to come into that inheritance prepared for them, the unrighteous were sent into that fire prepared not for people, but for the devil. The Lord has “*no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*” (Ezekiel 33:11) “*The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*” (2 Peter 3:9) The Lord prepared a salvation great enough for the whole world. Jesus was the *propitiation for the sins of the whole world.* (1 John 2:2) It is beyond tragic that any should be lost to eternal death in hell.

And again Jesus substantiates His pronouncement of judgment with irrefutable evidence, the evidence of the lives of those who are lost. And again it comes down to the number **one**. Even as Jesus didn’t need to point out a long list of good deeds done by the righteous, but declared that the good done to one was good done to the Lord, so now the Lord need not make a long list of failures to do good. It just takes one, **one** miss, **one** failure to see the person in need and love them as one loves self, and Jesus’ pronouncement is confirmed. You see all those who trust in their own fine deeds for

righteousness instead of trusting Jesus' righteousness are under the law for righteousness. And the law demands perfection. *"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."* (James 2:10) You mess up **once** and you are a lawbreaker. It is that way with man's justice, so of course it will be so with the most holy and just God. You need grace to be delivered from the perdition of hell. What Paul wrote by inspiration makes it clear you can't have it both ways. *"You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."* (Galatians 5:4)

So Jesus declares the conclusion of the matter:

Matthew 25:46 "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

There is no in between. It is the FINAL Judgment. There will be no more chances for repentance or grace. So let us walk with an awareness that the Day is coming and it is Final. Because of the grace of God that has taken possession of our hearts we anticipate the day of Christ's coming with joy, even the eagerness of being reunited with our loved ones whose spirits are now with the Lord. However, there is also a note of urgency that we should keep before us. We are here with a purpose, to show forth the praises of our Lord and Savior. (1 Peter 2:9) There are so many, numbering in the thousands of millions of souls, who still need to hear the gospel. Share your faith in Jesus, share your knowledge of God's love and forgiveness, share your hope of eternal life with those around you, especially those you know and love lest they be separated with the lost. Like Jesus, **"We must work the works of Him who sent us while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."** (John 9:4)

AMEN.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans 15:13)