

## The End

### Matthew 25:31-46

This is one of the many texts in both the Old and New Testaments that speak of the Last Day, the Judgment Day, and the end of the world.

The Judgment Day is a topic that is usually spoken of with nervousness, if not outright fear. You rarely hear the words “The Judgment Day” uttered by someone with a smile on their face or in the same tones someone would use to speak about DisneyWorld.

The fact is, even in as Biblical a church as the LCMS, we don’t talk much about the Last Day and the Judgment. Why? I can only speak personally. I have not preached a lot on the Last Day and Christ’s return because of two things:

First, we don’t know when it will be. Jesus Himself tells us that it is not given to us to know when He will return. In Matthew 24 He says: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the

flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” [Matthew 24:36-40]

And in the first chapter of Acts, just before His Ascension, Jesus tells His disciples: “It is not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by His own authority.” [Acts 1-7]

So, while Jesus says there will be signs which will attend His return and we are to look for them, we will not be able to determine exactly when He is coming back.

Second, the Gospel tells us that no matter when Jesus returns, if we are found believing in Him, we are prepared. Whether that time is before we complete this worship service or 10,000 years from now, if we are in faith, we are ready.

So, I have not expended a lot of preaching time talking about the Last Day or the Judgment.

So, I’m going to make up for 36 years of neglect right now. This may take awhile.....

Seriously, the Judgment and the Last Day are serious subjects. Jesus takes them very seriously, as in this text from Matthew 25 wherein He describes the process of judging all people. He talks

about it to His disciples and others during His 3 ½ years of ministry on earth.

What makes it important? Several things:

First, there will be a judgment. This may seem self-evident because we have heard of it all our lives, but imagine if it were not. Imagine what life right now would be like if there were no expectation of judgment at some point.

It is a part of all of us, I would guess, that wants to believe that man is inherently good, that, given the right set of circumstances, or even a neutral set of circumstances, people will choose the morally correct action.

Sadly, neither Scripture nor history bears this out. Scripture tells us in no uncertain terms that man is inherently sinful, that is, self-centered, and left to his own devices, will act selfishly. That is, unless there is some expectation of punishment for bad behavior. God has said that He has placed in Law in the hearts of all men. Why? Because if there was not mutual agreement among people – believers and unbelievers alike – upon what is good and bad, there could be no society. There would be no civilization without a basic shared morality.

That morality derives from the Law of God and the expectation of a judgment, either immediate or eventual.

It is why capitalism works and socialism never has. Capitalism, for all its faults, is reality based. At its heart is the recognition that people will always act in their own self-interest. It harnesses that and uses it to advance civilization. Socialism depends on a perceived goodness in man that will accommodate some living off the fruits of others' work. This fallacy is why it never works.

The perception of punishment for wrongdoing is what keeps evil in check in society. And the recognition by many, many of the world's people that there will be an ultimate settling of accounts is what enables society to exist.

So, the reality of a coming judgment gives meaning to life. Otherwise, it's simply might makes right, and survival of the fittest.

Second, the reality of the Last Day and the Judgment is important because it assures us that history is moving toward something. Life is not an aimless wandering toward who knows what. It has purpose and meaning and is moving toward an end. So, the reality of the Last Day and Judgment gives structure to life and history and the future.

Third, and this is only something believers in Jesus recognize, the Last Day and the Judgment will demonstrate to all mankind the existence of God and the truth of His Word. Many of you who follow Jesus, like me, I'm sure, have fantasized about Jesus' coming again in the clouds in glory, surrounded by the angelic host, and turning to the person we've been trying to convince of the truth of God's Word and saying, "Told you so." I know, it's sinful, and I hope I can resist the impulse, but it's a guilty pleasure to think about it.

Fourth, and most important, for Christians it is our Homecoming. There is no doubt and no argument that, according to the witness of Jesus and the rest of Scripture, the Last Day is going to be unsettling. The Scriptural witness is that it will be a day in which everything we consider foundational and immovable in this world will be changed. Language talking about stars falling from the skies, the earth moving, and so forth is used to communicate what it will be like. It will be, at best, unsettling.

But for those who believe in Christ, it will be something else, as well. Our Savior will be coming to take us home, to the rooms He has prepared for us in heaven.

In our Friday morning Men's Breakfast Bible Study we have been having a fascinating discussion about the soul, death, the body, resurrection and the Last Day. One of the teachings that

has emerged is the emphasis that the Bible places on the importance of the body.

Unlike many religions which denigrate the physical aspect of existence, in particular, our bodies, either considering them completely evil or of no importance, the Bible lifts up our bodies as precious gifts of God, even temples of the Holy Spirit, and as loved by God as are our souls.

An important aspect of the Last Day will be the General Resurrection, the raising back to life the bodies of all who have ever lived, good and evil, believers and unbelievers. At the Last Day, the souls and bodies of those who have died will be reunited.

The Last Day and the Judgment will be a vastly different experience for believers in Christ and those who did not believe. In the text from Matthew Jesus calls them sheep and goats. If this were the only text from Scripture that we had, we might come away with the erroneous understanding that at the Judgment we will be judged on the basis of our works, good or bad. At a first reading of this text it seems to say this. "I was hungry and you gave me to eat; thirsty and you gave me to drink, etc." or "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, and so forth."

But, please notice that the separation between those who are going to heaven and those who are going to hell takes place

before any mention of what they have done. They are separated on the basis of whether they are sheep or goats, that is, upon what they are. They are sheep or goats. They are believers or unbelievers. The good works come out or fail to come out of what they are. A faithful heart brings forth good works; an unfaithful heart brings forth evil.

For the sheep, the believers in Christ, this is a great day, a joyous day. They are receiving the full gift of eternal life from Jesus, the Good Shepherd they have trusted, worshipped, and followed. Notice that they are surprised that they have done all these kind things to Him. They were just living out the selfless, other-directed lives the Spirit brought out of their faith.

The goats, on the other hand, are also surprised. They have done nothing for others because there was no faith, no Spirit. For them this is a day of terror, for they will be cast out of the presence of the Lord of life and will spend eternity with others like them, apart from God.

When we die, our souls go to be with the Lord who died for us. We are in His care, and we will await the reunion of our bodies and souls at the Last Day. Then we will enjoy the full blessings of eternal life, body and soul, in the presence of God.

If you are a believer in Jesus as your Savior. If you believe that His sacrifice on the cross paid the debt for your sins and that He took all the punishment you deserve and if you are trusting Him alone for your salvation, you are ready for the Last Day and have nothing to fear. Indeed, Jesus, when He describes the Last Day to His disciples, He describes all these unnerving things happening, but He says to them, “When you see these things happening, you look up, for your redemption is drawing near.”

We have nothing to fear from the Last Day or the Judgment of Christ. By God’s grace, through our Baptism, by faith in Jesus alone, we have forgiveness and eternal life. He is coming to take us home forever.

But how do we want Him to find us? Do we want Him to find us apathetic about our faith? Do we want Him to come back to find us giving little attention to living the life He has called us to live? Do we hope that He will find us busily engaged about our own business, increasing our own wealth, making our own lives more comfortable, with little regard for the physical needs of others? Do we hope that when He returns He will find us smug in our faith and our own salvation, never having shared the Good News of salvation by faith as a free gift with anyone else?

I can only answer for me. I hope that if Jesus returns during my lifetime, He will find me busy about the things of His Kingdom,

busy sharing the blessings He has given me with others, living a life of service, kindness, and agape love, and sharing what I know about Him with others. And if I die before He comes, when He opens the book of my life, I hope He will smile and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

If He returns to find us in faith and living the life of faith, then we have nothing to fear, and everything to anticipate with joy of the Last Day and the Judgment.