

November 9, 2008
The Last Judgment

"Everyone Will Face the Final Judgment"

MATTHEW 25:31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' ⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Consider for a moment that you have been with Jesus and his disciples during his last week in Jerusalem before he died. You have seen the religious leaders confront Jesus in the temple courts and you have been impressed at how Jesus handled their tough questions. You have walked with Jesus across the Kidron Valley, and now you are sitting with him on the Mount of Olives and listening to him talk about the end of the world, the kingdom of God that lasts forever, and judgment day.

What Jesus said that day on the Mount of Olives applies very much to the times in which we are living and to our personal lives. The signs are flashing brightly; signs of wars, famine, false teaching in the church, and the love of many growing cold. This may be the last week of our lives here on this earth. What happens to the stock market or General Motors or the war in Iraq or your job might be totally insignificant.

This morning we want to focus our attention specifically on what Jesus said about the last judgment or final judgment. No one can escape this judgment that is coming. It looms up large over the entire human race. For those who are with Jesus this will be the happiest day of their lives. For those who are without Jesus it will be a day of horrendous horror as they hear the words from Jesus, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the everlasting

fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

What joy for the sheep who are with Jesus

Jesus compares the final judgment to a shepherd separating his sheep from his goats. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” “When the Son of Man comes in glory...” There will be a day when the trumpet sounds, when there is the shout of an arch angel, and the heavens open up, and Jesus comes on clouds of glory. Jesus compared his coming to lightning flashing in the sky.

When this day comes the present heavens and earth will be destroyed, the elements will melt with fervent heat. All the dead will be raised to life. For some this will be a day of tremendous joy and happiness as they see Jesus face to face in his glory. For others this will be a day of horror as they face Jesus without his robe of righteousness to protect them. According to the Revelation they will cry out for the hills to cover them and the mountains to fall on them to save them from the wrath of the Lamb.

Jesus will separate all people the way a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. See the goats and sheep coming in from the pasture as the sun begins to set in the western sky. The shepherd puts the sheep in one pen, and the goats in another. On judgment day there will be a separation of all nations. It will not take days or hours, or be like standing in the line at DMV office. This will all happen in the blink of an eye.

King Jesus will say to those who are on his right hand, “Come you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Notice the invitation word “Come.” Maybe you can remember the day you invited the girl you wanted to marry to come and sit down, and then you presented her with an engagement ring. Or how about that day you invited your friend to come over to your house for a birthday cake and all her friends were in the darkened room shouting, “Happy Birthday.” Or “come,” let me show this picture I just received on the internet or cell phone. Jesus invites us to come and see the blessings he has waiting for us in the place he has prepared for us.

He does not say, “Come” see the place that you have earned. He says, “Come, you who are blessed by Father.” The blessings Jesus has waiting for us do not come to us by luck or chance. They do not come to us because we have earned them the way we might earn good grades in school by working hard. These blessings come only because we are blessed by the Father with the gift of his Son Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit that allows us to believe in Jesus as the source of our forgiveness and peace with God. Psalm 103 says, “Bless the Lord O my soul, Bless the Lord and forget not all his benefits. He forgives us all our sins and redeems us from the pit, and heals all our diseases, crowns us with love and compassion.”

Notice also that these blessings were prepared for us since the creation of the world. Way back in eternity God planned the world to be what he designed it to be. Way back in eternity he planned for you to believe in Jesus his Son for your salvation. Way back

in eternity he planned a place for you, a new heaven and a new earth that far exceeds anything this world has to offer. Listen to these amazing words from Ephesians 1 where it says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world be holy and blameless in his sight." Because our God blesses us and it does not depend on luck or hard work on our part, the Apostle Paul could say with confidence. Now there is in store for me a crown of righteousness, which Christ the righteous judge will award to me on that day, not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." The Revelation says of Christians, "These are they who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

It was such a blessing for me to be with Lorenz Heinze before the Lord took him home last Sunday. He so eagerly looked forward to having Jesus say to him, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you." As we sing in the hymn, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

When that day comes, there will be the added joy of having Jesus call attention to all those good things we have done out of love for him. "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Jesus is the vine, we are the branches miraculously attached to him. He is the source of forgiveness and peace with God. There is also the fruit that is produced in our lives that Jesus loves to see. He cannot wait to show us how we were able to be used for him in ways that we never fully understood or appreciated in this lifetime on this earth. That is why we will say, "When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison and go to visit you?"

Jesus tells us how these things happened without us even realizing it. "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me." Remember that kid in school that others were picking on. You showed him kindness. Remember that new clerk behind the check out counter having an awful day. You showed her compassion. Remember that relative who wants nothing to do with Jesus. You prayed and you prayed your heart out for them. The Revelation says: Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Right now it does not seem all that clear how your life is doing much for the Lord. Someday it will become clear, in high definition, multi-pixelated images how much we have done for the Lord and his kingdom with the lives the Lord gives us on this earth. I wish I could just stop the sermon here and not have to talk about those people on Jesus' left. But this is in the Bible and Jesus did speak these words to his disciples on the Mount of Olives, and he wants us to know the truth of what will happen to those who have rejected him.

What horror for the goats who are without Jesus

"Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." This is very serious stuff. These are the words

that could be spoken to people you know such as your friends at school, your brother or sister, your neighbor, your aunt or your uncle." Depart from me you who are cursed! The ultimate evil that could ever befall someone is to be separated from God's love forever. The Bible tells us that this place of eternal torment is a place of fire, a place of suffering, a place where the worm does not die, a place prepared for the devil and his angels. People try to get rid of this teaching. Thomas Jefferson cut out the part of the Bible he did not like, and made his own version. One atheist made the statement that the greatest peace he ever felt in life was convincing himself there was no God.

Jesus points to the reason why he had to send these people away forever. "For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink...." They will ask, "When did we see you hungry and thirsty," and Jesus will respond with the words, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for the least of these you did not do for me." When I hear these words of Jesus, I think of how often I have failed to show kindness to people as I should. Have you ever lost your patience with someone? How about that telemarketer on the phone who tried to be dishonest with you? On the surface our works don't look much different from people who don't have Jesus do they? Isaiah says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." But then Isaiah goes on to say, "Yet, O Lord, you are the Father, We are the clay and you are the potter, we are all the work of your hand." Lord you are the potter we are the clay. The hand of God found a way to make your life acceptable to him on the day of judgment. He found a way to forgive you of all your shortcomings by having Jesus be punished in your place. He found a way to have Jesus live a perfect life on this earth, and place this into your account so that on judgment day we can hear Jesus say to us, "Come you who are blessed by my Father." Just think of how every moment of your life changes this coming week when you know and believe that judgment day is right around the corner. "Even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly." Amen.