

Matthew 25:31-46

Once again the end of the **church** year has almost arrived, and we turn our attention to the end of this **world** as we now know it. As we do so, our thoughts center on the **Last Day**, and on the **judgment** which will take place on that day. There are a lot of **supposedly** learned men in this world today who are spreading around a lot of **false** ideas concerning the last days of the world, including the Judgment Day itself. You can find these men right in your own **homes** - on your **radio** waves and **television** screens. You might even find a few of them on your **CD** players or cassette **tape** recorders. Now, my purpose this morning is not going to be to name a bunch of names, and try to convince you about whom you should or should not listen to. Rather, my purpose today is to show you what our Lord Jesus **Himself** said about the Last Day, so you can make your own choices, and so we can make the most **profitable** use of the time which we have remaining before the end arrives.

Our theme for the day is **The Second Coming Of The Lord**, and there are three things which our Lord makes clear about His return. Christ's return will be in **glory**, there will be a **gathering** which takes place, and there will also be a **dividing** which takes place.

Since we have almost reached the **end** of one church year, that also means we are rapidly approaching the **beginning** of another church year. I mention that only because our church year always begins with the **Advent** Season. Advent is a time of **preparation** - a time when we look forward to celebrating the **first** coming of the Lord. I think we're all pretty **familiar** with that first coming. Jesus was born in **poverty** and **weakness**. His place of birth was **Bethlehem**, in a **stable** - a **barn**. His **crib** was a feeding trough for the animals, and His **clothes** were strips of cloth wrapped around Him for warmth. Jesus grew up in the city of **Nazareth** as the son of a lowly carpenter. When He later **left** that home and began His public **ministry**, He didn't become a wealthy **landowner**. Instead, He had **no place** to call His own. Jesus associated Himself with "*tax collectors and sinners,*" and was often seen with the **poor**, the **downtrodden**, the **prostitutes**, and the **thieves** of this world. He was despised by **most** people, persecuted by **many**, attacked by a **few**, and put to death by us **all** - a shameful, criminal's death on a **cross**! Certainly, from a strictly human point of view, it would have been very difficult for anyone to recognize this man as the **Lord** of the universe, and the **Savior** of the world. Jesus' first coming was veiled in **poverty** and **weakness**.

But His **second** coming will be **different** - **much** different. To show the great contrast Jesus said, "*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory.*" When Jesus comes to the earth for the second and **final** time, there will be no **doubt** about who He is. All people will know for certain that He is the **King** of kings and the **Lord** of lords, because this time He will come in **glory** and **power**. For starters, Jesus will bring all the **angels** with Him. Anybody who knows anything about angels knows that angels possess a **tremendous** amount of power. Luther once said that one angel is more powerful than the whole **world**. I don't know whether that's true or not, but I do know from the Bible that one angel destroyed an army of 185,000 fully-armed soldiers **in one night**. That's a **lot** of power! I also know that there are **multitudes** of these angels - so many that the Bible doesn't even try to count them. Instead it lists figures like - "*Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.*" Any way you look at it, that amounts to a **lot** of glory and power - and **Jesus** is in control of it **all**!

While we're talking about the angels, we should probably note that they're going to be very **busy** on the Last Day. Jesus tells us, "*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.*" Now, at first that doesn't seem to tell us much about the **angels**. But a little earlier Jesus had told His disciples, "*All the nations will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.*" So, the **angels** will be doing the **gathering** of the people on the Last Day.

Notice that the gathering takes place in **all nations**. That fact reinforces the importance of the Great **Commission** where Jesus said, "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" Our work of making disciples for Jesus by baptizing and by teaching must **continue** full speed ahead until the Last Day - and it must extend to **all nations**. But the real **importance** of that statement rests not so much in the **gathering** which will take place, but rather in the **dividing** which will **also** take place.

Actually, there have been **divisions** or separate **groups** of people in the world ever since the time of **Cain** and **Abel**. There are still many divisions today. In fact, some of those divisions can even be found within the visible **church**. To

some people, such divisions are very **puzzling** and even **upsetting**, but we should not be surprised that those divisions exist. They are only one of the results of **sin** in the world. And whether we like it or not, those who attempt to **remove** all divisions will be **unsuccessful** - because **sin** will continue to exist, and will continue to **divide** us until this world ends. In fact, as we are about to see, the **greatest** divisions are yet to **come**!

The **first** of these great divisions is that the **righteous** will be divided from the **cursed**. It is the King **Himself** who carries out this division - the King who is returning to the earth with **glory**, with **power**, and with the **authority** to judge. This separation is compared to a shepherd dividing the **sheep** from the **goats**. The key to this separation is that it is based on what they **are** - **not** on what they have **done**. Granted, the judge gives a public account of what the sheep **did**, and of what the goats did **not** do, but notice that this account comes only **after** the division has already **taken place**. The sheep (or believers) had **followed** the voice of their Shepherd. They had done the things He had **asked** of them. But they had done them **because** they were **sheep** - sheep who were **trusting** and **dependent** by nature. Now remember, that's **not** the kind of nature which we possessed at **birth**. It is the nature which has been **given** to us by our **God**. Believers **do** good because believers **are** good - and they **are** good because they have been **made** good, only through the righteousness of **Christ**!

I find it very interesting that when Jesus **lists** all the things which the believers had done in His behalf, they were **unaware** of these good deeds. They hadn't kept a **record** of their actions. In fact, they had to be **told** that as they were living their lives in **faith**, and carrying out their **everyday** tasks, they were showing the **fruits** of their **faith** - for the Bible tells us, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*"

That's where the **goats** (the unbelievers) had their **problem**. They had **thought** that they were going **good** things - that they were **pleasing** God. But that was **impossible**. These unbelievers were like water which was flowing out of a **polluted** fountain. While the water can flow very **freely**, it can only be **polluted** water. They had **not** followed the voice of their Shepherd, but instead, they had resorted to **butting their heads** against every obstacle they encountered. Why? Because they were **goats** - goats who were **stubborn** and **rebellious** by nature, and for that reason, they are eternally **separated** from the **sheep**.

However, an even more **tragic** division takes place when these unbelievers are separated from **God**. The **righteous** are welcomed with open arms, and receive the **inheritance** which God has prepared for His children. But the **unbelievers** are not **in** His family, and therefore, they receive **punishment**. Jesus said, “*Depart from Me, you who are **cursed**, into the **eternal fire** prepared for the **devil** and his **angels**.*” The original Greek is far more **descriptive**. It resounds like three **crushing blows** against the wicked. It says, “*Depart into the fire - the **eternal one** - the one prepared for the **devil** and his **angels**.*” My friends, we have been given the **privilege** of sharing the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ through **God’s Word**, and the **sacraments** of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. That precious Gospel has the power to change **goats** into **sheep**, so that they too may **avoid** those three crushing blows - and instead of inheriting eternal **death**, inherit eternal **life**.

The current church year comes to an **end** in just two short weeks. Have we shared the Gospel with as many as we possibly can? I dare say we **haven’t** - at least **I** haven’t. We can’t change the **past**, but we are standing on the threshold of a **new** church year. And in this coming year, by God’s grace, may we strive to **make up** for lost time. We don't know when the King will **return** in all His glory to **judge** the world. But when He **does**, we will not want to be found guilty of **hindering** even one of His sheep from entering into the fold. Therefore, let us work **hard**, and let us work **fast**, so that **many** will receive Christ’s **righteousness** in these last days, and inherit the kingdom of **heaven**. Amen.