



Sermon: A Vision of Life - Pastor Todd Goldschmidt

Sunday 10:15 am – November 20th, 2011 – At [Living Hope Lutheran Church](#)

Sermon Text:

Matthew 25:31-46 New International Version 1984 (NIV1984)

³¹ “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.”



Sermon: A Vision of Life

Christ the King Sunday – 10:15 am – November 20th, 2011 – **Pastor Todd Goldschmidt**

Before science became the final court of meaning in our world, artists depicted scenes of a different court on a different day: the Day of Judgment, when Christ the King will return to judge the living and the dead. Most every church I visited in the Ukraine had such paintings, at times covering entire walls, with this common theme: the heavens are torn open as Christ descends on a throne and the earth is breaking apart as the dead rise from their graves. The paintings are always extremely busy, filled with many angels, demons and human bodies. One factor is fairly consistent: If you stare at the face of just one human being, you'll see a look of wonder. As you look more closely, you'll see that person is among a larger group of people who seem as if they're just waking up from a deep sleep and only beginning to discover the deeper meaning of their returning Lord, and of the life of the glorious world to come. These would be Jesus' sheep.

On the other hand, literally, another scene transpires: the goats on Jesus' left are in the grasp of Satan's demons, writhing in agony, with looks of sheer terror on their faces as they struggle with the awful truth that they are about to be dragged into hell, kicking and screaming. Quite often, the demons are doing horrific things to the damned, seemingly delighted that they get to vent their own angst on others, since they, too, share the fate of a forever future in the fires of hell originally "prepared for the devil and his angels" and not for man. The contrast between the two groups is a vivid reminder of what will transpire on that day of division when "All the nations are gathered before the Son of Man, and he separates the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."

What will determine which side we end up on that Day? WELS pastor Thomas Nass—a professor of Hebrew at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN—writes in his book, *End Times: Jesus is Coming Soon*: "There will be a separation into only two groups on the Last Day. If Jesus were living today, he might make other comparisons. When I bring in the mail, I quickly throw away the junk mail that is of no value to me. The rest I keep. When I buy strawberries, I sort them. Those that are rotten get thrown away. Those that are good are washed and served. In a similar fashion, the final judgment will consist of a simple division of all humanity into two categories."

Jesus speaks about the end of all things. He also speaks of beginnings: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance," He invites, "the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." Jesus calls heaven our inheritance. An inheritance isn't earned or deserved; it's freely given in love to one's heirs. Our heavenly bequest was given to us at the dawn of time. Paul wrote: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." To encourage us, he adds "that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" ...

Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Class 9am)

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Page 2 of 5



To the damned, He pronounces this terrifying verdict: “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” God never intended hell to include humans. From the very beginning, the LORD meant for mankind to live in eternal fellowship and blessedness with Him. No one was predestined to hell, despite what strict Calvinists maintain. All people were created to live in perfect harmony with God and with each other, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden prior to their fall into sin. Those who end up in hell are “condemned” because they “have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” ^(John 3:18), who said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” ^(John 14:6).

Nass writes, “As awful as it is to think about, it is important to realize that the suffering of hell is eternal. According to the Bible, the suffering will continue on and on without end forever. The adjectives *eternal* and *everlasting* are commonly used with regard to the punishment of hell (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:41, 46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 7). These are the same adjectives used with regard to the blessedness of heaven. So if a person says the blessedness of heaven continues forever, the same needs to be said about hell. The apostle John said clearly, ‘They will be tormented day and night forever and ever’ (Rev. 20:10). Jesus says that the fire of hell ‘never goes out’ (Mark 9:43). “On the other hand,” Nass adds, “One of the chief blessings of heaven is that its blessedness will go on and on continually forever without ever stopping. Peter said that we have ‘an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade’ (1 Pet. 1:4). Pleasures on earth inevitably wear out and lose their luster. In heaven, the bliss of seeing God will be fresh and exhilarating each and every day, without end. [There we will wear] ‘the crown of glory that will never fade away’ (1 Pet. 5:4). (pp. 170-171)!”

The good works Jesus cites in our passage are simply the evidence that sincere trust in Jesus always produces fruits of faith. Our Lutheran Confessions address this matter in [Philip] Melancthon’s Apology of the Augsburg Confession written in 1531. Referring to [our passage] he said, “In this and all similar passages in which works are praised in the Scriptures, it is necessary to understand not only outward works, but also the faith of the heart . . . When eternal life is granted to works, it is granted to those who have been justified. Only justified people, who are led by the Spirit of Christ, can do good works . . . The fruit pleases because of faith.” (*The Book of Concord*, pp. 171-172) Consider a comparison. Imagine that you look out the window to determine whether it’s windy outside. You can’t see the wind, but you can see that the flag is sticking straight out and that the fallen leaves are skipping quickly across the lawn. It’s windy! Faith can’t be seen. But faith in Christ produces good works as fruits of that faith. If we see the fruits of faith, Jesus says, then we know that saving faith is present. In the end, it is still faith in Christ alone that is the ultimate basis for judgment on the day we die or on the Last Day.



“Imagine yourself inside an ancient walled city, the gates shut up tight against the threat of an enemy army. Now imagine your king riding toward those gates, his standard snapping in the sunlight. Would you open the gate and welcome the king? When the King of glory, Jesus Christ, arrived on earth in the flesh, His own people rejected Him. Israel—God’s outward, visible people in that day and place—refused to recognize Jesus’ lordship. They not only slammed their gates down tight, they crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). Still today many in the outward, visible church pay lip service to Christ’s lordship but inwardly reject His authority in their lives. They explain away the truth of His Word rather than submitting in repentance and faith. Our King of glory will return to judge the living and the dead. That day will be full of joy for those who have received from Christ the clean hands and pure hearts of Psalm 24:4. We will receive blessings from the Lord into all eternity and the vindication of those made righteous by the blood of the Lamb (Ps. 24:5). How can this holy hope strengthen you for today’s challenges? How might you share it with someone?” (Today’s Light Bible with devotions by Jane L. Fryar, CPH, St. Louis, MO, 1999, p. 772) in the week ahead?

So, while we eagerly await our King’s return, He who blesses those who give a cup of cold water in His name means for us to care deeply about those who suffer. As the lead Sufferer, He takes it personally when we don’t. James says that pure religion is looking after ‘orphans and widows in their distress’ (1:27). John says that if anyone has material possessions, sees a brother in need, and does nothing, he does not have the love of God in him (1 John 3:17). The God of healing, deliverance and providence cannot be any clearer: Those who aren’t deeply concerned about those who suffer aren’t like Him at all. The return of Jesus will expose us. We either cared for people in His name or we didn’t. The difference on this side of eternity is noticeable. The difference on the other side is just staggering. The question for us, once we’ve seen the desperation of the world, is whether we will be like God or not. Will we recognize that suffering grieves the heart of the Rescuer God? Will we let the Savior save through us? Will the body of Christ reflect the mind of Christ? Will there be enough evidence to convict us on that Day as those who truly belonged to the Lord or not?” (The One Year At His Feet Devotional, Chris Tiegen, Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., Carol Stream, IL, 2003, p. 64).

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Page 4 of 5



Thank God this morning, that if today were the Day of His return, we'd have nothing to fear! Because, you see, we are those who have been clothed in the spotless robe of our coming King! We are among His sacred sheep, His faithful subjects, despite our sins and weaknesses, our shortcomings and our sins, our fears and our failures. At our baptism into Christ, we “put on Christ!” “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,” (1 John 3:2) John wrote. What a glorious, glorious sight that will be when we see our Savior King, “coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30)! This side of eternity, we'll never fully comprehend the depth and breadth of the good works we've done during the course of our lifetime. We don't keep track. But God does. He notes even the smallest things we do out of love for those who walk in His name. He sees our earnest efforts to live lives of love toward unbelievers too, and the sincere ways we share with them “the hope that we have.”

In 1304, Giotto di Bondone began working on a series of frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy. At the very back of the chapel is the largest scene of all—the Last Judgment. At the bottom of the image, underneath the cross, is the doorway by which worshipers return to the world. The last image they see as they do so is “the Son of Man” returning in His glory. Imagine what that would be like! In less spectacular fashion—but equally apropos—our sister church in Des Moines (Holy Trinity Lutheran) has a banner at the door of their foyer bearing these words: “You are now entering the mission field.” Both the art and the letters leave God's people with the same message: now is the time of God's favor; now is the day of salvation. Let the vision of the Final Judgment shape your life. As you walk through the door, opened by the cross, you enter God's world with a deeper understanding. You see things differently: the creation of this world, your Lord, even your life of service. Assured of your salvation, rejoice in God's vision of life for the “now” and the “not yet”; for the “here,” and the “hereafter.” Amen.