Second Sunday of End Time
+ LAST JUDGMENT +
November 8, 2015
10:15 am

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: First Things First!

I. First, Christ Came to Sacrifice Himself for the Sins of Mankind

II. On Judgment Day, He Will Return to Bring Salvation to His Waiting Ones

Sermon Text: Hebrews 9:24-28

24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.
“First things first.” You know what that means, right? Let’s say you invited company for dinner, you want everything prepared as perfectly as possible. It’s especially critical, however, to put “first things first” if you’re following a fairly intricate recipe for the very first time or you might end up serving your guests an inedible mess! It’s “first things first” at school too. Teachers instruct their students to write their name on the top of every assignment they turn in. If not, they might find out the hard way that they were graded down because they didn’t follow the instruction to put “first things first.”

Our God is a God of order. He invented the concept of “first things first.” Just work your way through the initial chapter of the Bible and marvel at the pattern God used as He laid out the building blocks of life here on planet earth. Each successive day built upon the ones before so that all was perfectly prepared for God to set Creation’s crown jewel in place. In Genesis 1:26—on the sixth and final day of crafting His masterpiece—God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit confer together and conclude as One: “Let us make mankind in our image.” God ceded full authority over the entire earth to them with one exception. In Genesis 2 we read that “The LORD God . . . commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’” (vv. 15-17).

The fallen angel, Satan, coiled himself around that tree in the guise of a serpent and whispered to Eve as she walked by, “Psssst, Eve! No, not there. Over here.” Startled, Eve finally spied the evil asp lurking behind the leaves of the one tree in the garden God had declared verboten. Satan came at her with a one-two combination. First, he sowed the seeds of doubt in her mind: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” Eve rightly replied, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” Satan scoffed and finished Eve off with a brazen lie: “You will not certainly die,” [he] said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

It sounded too good to be true! And it was. Eve and Adam both caved in, and, in doing so, lost their pristine home, their moral perfection and their intimate bond with God and with each other. God drove them out of Eden and cursed them and the entire picture-perfect world He’d crafted just for them. Sadly, they hadn’t put “first things first.” But in His unfailing love, God made the most amazing pledge ever spoken. He told the devil: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” One glorious future day, a singular seed of the woman would come to liberate creation from its bondage to decay, destroy the devil’s work, restore our relationship with God, release us from death’s grip and ransom us for eternity. And that’s precisely what the God-man, Jesus, did! St. Paul writes: “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship” (Gal. 4:4-5).

The Greek word for adoption to sonship is a legal term denoting the full legal status of an adopted male heir in Roman culture. John puts it this way: “What great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not
know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3:1-2). Christ’s return is 100% certain. He predicted it many times, and the rest of Scripture also testifies to this truth. He’ll return to usher His children thru heaven’s gate and consign Satan’s offspring to hell’s fiery pit. But let’s put “first things first.” First, Christ came to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world. Jesus was born in a barn, and as an itinerant rabbi walked Palestine’s dusty roads, healing the sick, driving out demons and preaching the good news of God’s kingdom. St. Paul describes Him to a “T” in Philippians 2:6-11:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus is one-of-a-kind: He’s the only being who’s ever possessed two distinct yet inseparable natures: one, divine; the other, human. He’s unique, too, in that He’s existed in two very distinct states: His “state of exaltation” in which He rules over all things, and His “state of humiliation” in which He subjected Himself to the Law’s demands, keeping each perfectly for us. He also bore our sins and guilt on the cross, making full payment for them by His death. He cried out, “It is finished! Mission accomplished,” and then entrusted His Spirit to His Father. His humiliation concluded when His lifeless body was buried in a tomb and its entrance was sealed with a massive mill-stone. Sometime during the next three days, Jesus returned His state of exaltation, as we confess in the Apostles Creed: “He descended into hell”—to declare His victory over Satan—“On the third day, he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there, he will come to judge the living and the dead.”

So what’s Jesus doing until then? Our text tells us! The writer reflects upon Jesus’ supremacy over the high priest of the past as well as over the annual sacrifice he’d offer on the Day of Atonement. The high priest would go behind the curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple and sprinkle its blood on the Ark of the Covenant’s cover, symbolically atoning for his own sins and the sins of God’s people. By contrast, “Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

“First things first.” First and foremost, Jesus came to offer Himself as God’s spotless sacrificial Lamb, “who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). As our text says, “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” My friends, every day is Judgment Day. “Ours times
are in God’s hands” the Psalmist wrote (31:15). God “‘knit us together in our mother’s womb” (Ps. 139:13-16) and He will call us out of this life to the next in His own time and way. “For the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” Solomon says (Eccl. 12:7).

The question is, are we ready? Are we ready to meet Jesus as our Righteous Judge? For we, too, “are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” just like everyone else. There’s no “second chance” to get it right after we die. There’s no purgatory for us to do penance in; no “do overs,” “try—try—again” or “mulligans” to take after we’re gone.

So we’d best be ready for that Day when He will come back on the clouds of heaven, with rank upon rank of His awe-inspiring angels, to judge the living and the dead. The dead will be raised to life and reunited with their immortal souls kept either in heaven or in hell. Then everyone will have to give an account for every careless word they’ve spoken as well as the manifold sins, flaws, failures and faults they have as folks who are naturally inclined to rebel against God as Adam and Eve did at the dawn of time. It’ll be a dreadful day for all who grasp they were mistaken about Jesus. They’ll “say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us’” (Lk. 23:30) in a vain attempt to hide from the all-seeing Judge. But that won’t be our reaction. We’ve been clothed in the snow-white robe of Christ’s righteousness! It’ll be a day of unrestrained joy for all who trusted in Jesus! He comes “to bring salvation for those who were waiting for him”!

Seismologists warn us to be ready for “the big one.” A massive earthquake is set to hit our region. It’s not a matter of “if” but “when.” Is your disaster preparedness kit in order? Shouldn’t we be much more prepared for our Savior’s arrival when He returns to take us home to heaven? As you wait for that great Day to come—or for the day of your death—nourish your faith in Jesus: faithfully study His Word. Regularly partake of the Lord’s Supper. Come in repentance and faith, believing that in, with and under the bread and wine you also receive—in a supernatural way—the very body your Savior gave and the blood He shed on the cross for you. And take time to contemplate the miracle of your baptism into Christ. These are absolutely essential components in every spiritual disaster preparedness kit! The strength and sustenance the Spirit gives us through these Means of Grace are like the sustenance that branches receive from the tree they’re attached to.

Our Savior God assures us that “our present sufferings aren’t worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18) come Judgment Day or the day of our death. So what are we waiting for? Let’s **Put First Things First** and keep an eye on the sky! Amen.