

The Second-Last Sunday in the Church Year, A ✕ D 2008

Matthew 25:31-46 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Do you really believe that? That the day is surely drawing near when Jesus, God's anointed, in all His power shall appear as judge whom God appointed? Do you believe that fright shall banish idle mirth as flames on flames shall ravage earth as Scripture long has warned us? Or do you naively think that the day of Jesus' return is far, far off. It's not. It's nearer now than ever before. You should expect it at any moment. In fact, you should expect that Jesus will return before this sermon is over.

2 When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. How will the Shepherd judge sheep from goats? What will be His standard? Works. "The books are opened then to all, A record truly telling What each has done, both great and small, When he on earth was dwelling, And ev'ry heart be clearly seen, And all be known as they have been In thoughts and words and actions. Then woe to those who scorned the Lord And sought but carnal pleasures, Who here despised His precious Word And loved their earthly treasures! With shame and trembling they will stand And at the Judge's stern command To Satan be delivered."

3 What's the difference between sheep and goats? The goats want to know. They seem pretty righteous. The Judge said to the sheep, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and

you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” We did those things, too, say the goats. Look at our righteous works!

4 Therein lies the difference. When the Judge tells the sheep that they are to receive the kingdom of God because of their righteousness, they’re dumbfounded. Righteous works? No, not us, the sheep protest. “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And when the Judge tells the goats that they are cursed and will spend eternity in the fiery torment prepared for the devil, they’re likewise dumbfounded. “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” The sheep, who had no knowledge of their righteous works, are rewarded for their works. And the goats, who were banking on the Lord to look favorably at their righteousness, are punished because they have done nothing good.

5 If you think of yourself as a pretty righteous person, worthy of eternal commendation, you’ll be damned. If you esteem yourself a sinner, worthy of eternal punishment, you’ll be commended to eternal blessing. The goats had their list of works that they thought the Lord should regard. But the Judge had another list. The sheep never even considered their works good. But the Judge had another list. Repent of your self-righteousness. Repent of looking at your own works as righteous. Repent of doing nothing righteous. Repent and be found without spot or blemish.

6 When the Judge returns, you will be judged based on works; there’s no mistaking that in the parable. If you come to Judgment Day relying on your own works, you will be judged by your own works. If you come to Judgment Day supposing you have no righteous works, the Judge credits to you works far beyond your own righteousness. The Judge is the only One Righteous. Being found blameless and righteous is to be found with the righteousness of Him who is the Righteousness of God.

7 When Jesus returns, it won’t be the first time God-in-Human-Flesh visited His creation. “The Savior paid the debt you owe And for your sin was smitten.” The condemnation that will be spoken to the goats was first spoken to the Son of God: “Depart from me, you cursed.” Cursed for the sin of the world, exiled from the very presence of God the Father, smitten with the complete wrath of God. Your sin became His sin. Your death and damnation became His death and damnation. You will be found blameless, spotless, and sinless, if

you are found in Jesus. You will be judged by works. Those who want to find comfort in their own righteousness will be judged based on their works; those who look at themselves and see only sin will be judged based on the works of Jesus. You will be righteous based on works, but not your own works.

8 And then, since your sin is now Jesus' sin, His righteousness is your righteousness. The sheep have done the righteous works for which the Judge praises them. They really have, even though they don't know it. Christians do good works without realizing it. Faith produces fruit, but it seems unrecognizable until the Judge points it out.

9 Come, you who are blessed by the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Come, you who are blessed by the Father, receive the body and blood of Him who died to pay for your sin. Come, you who are blessed by the Father, eat the food that strengthens your faith and enables you to love one another. Come, you blessed by the Father, here is the sustenance that fuels your good works. Come, you blessed by the Father; the day is surely drawing near. "O Jesus Christ, do not delay, But hasten our salvation; We often tremble on our way In fear and tribulation. O hear and grant our fervent plea: Come, mighty Judge, and set us free From death and ev'ry evil."

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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