

Lord, When Did We See You?  
Matthew 25:31-46  
November 23, 2014

*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. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 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. 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." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, 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 invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" 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." 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. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 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." 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?" 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." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*

Grace, mercy, and peace from the King of kings, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. Traditionally, the church has set aside the last Sunday of the church year for a special look at Jesus as our King.

During Advent and Christmas we focus on our Savior coming into our world as the child Messiah. At Epiphany we examine how God opened the message of his grace to all people. During Lent and Holy Week we see our suffering Savior. Easter gives us the joyous celebration of a risen Savior.

The longer period of Pentecost is our examination of Christ's church on earth and how it is to operate. Finally, as the church year comes to an end, we observe Christ the King Sunday. We look forward to seeing our victorious Savior return as King to judge the peoples of the earth.

Jesus, in the role of judge, is not the way most people think of him. If you ask different people to describe Jesus, you would probably get a picture of Jesus much like King David portrayed him in the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm. I'm sure you would hear about the Good Shepherd caring for his sheep. You would hear about how his rod and staff protect and comfort his people. You might even begin to visualize green pastures and still waters.

After all, all of these pictures of Jesus are true. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He guards us and guides us. He provides us with all that we will ever need for this life and the life to come. Jesus loves us, he accepts us, he forgives us. But if this is the only Jesus we see, we are only seeing half the picture. Among God's attributes are his holiness and his justice. That means that God must deal with sin.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God warns: *The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword* (Jer 25:31 NIV). These words don't come from a mean and nasty God. These words come from a holy and just God. And the one who will deliver God's judgment and justice is Jesus Christ.

With this groundwork laid, let's take a look at today's Gospel reading about the sheep and the goats. First, we'll look at some important highlights of the reading to be sure we understand exactly what Jesus is saying. Then we'll look at how we might measure up if today is the day Jesus returns.

Jesus begins by saying: *When the Son of Man comes in his glory* (Mt 25:31 NIV). I've heard people ask, What if Jesus comes back and I miss it? Trust me, when Jesus returns no one will miss it. If you're busy at work, you'll know. If you're sound asleep, you'll know. If you're dead and buried, you'll know.

When Jesus returns it will be in all his glory. The Bible says the clouds will roll back like a scroll. Jesus will return with a trumpet blast that all the world will hear – living and dead alike. The next time Jesus comes to earth it won't be as a baby, it won't be as a carpenter, it won't be as a suffering servant. In his second advent, Jesus will be the righteous judge, who rewards the faithful and punishes the wicked.

Next, we learn that everyone will be judged. The Bible uses the term all nations. Both the believer and the unbeliever will be judged. Those whose faith is in Christ will be judged righteous because of what Christ has done. Those without faith will be condemned. And this judging will not be done by our flawed human standards. This judgment will be made according to God's perfect holiness.

Our reading tells us the first judgment will be made on the righteous. Jesus extends to them the invitation to enter *the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world* (Mt 25:34 NIV). Think about that. When you enter heaven, you'll be arriving at the place God created for you. In his infinite love, God designed and built your eternal home even before he built the world.

What Jesus does next is very interesting. Jesus runs out a list of the good works the faithful have performed: providing food and drink for the hungry, housing the homeless, clothing the poor, tending to the sick and shut-in, bringing compassion and forgiveness to those in prison. Good deeds don't save you, but they sure do make the Lord happy. They make him so happy he's going to brag to the whole world about the faithful.

There is something else to see before we leave God's judgment on the faithful. God's faithful people are judged completely without mention of any sins they might have done. That's because there are no sins to be listed.

Every faithful believer, who has been cleansed by the blood of Christ, has had his or her sins totally erased. God can't see the sins of the faithful because the blood of Jesus has removed those sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:11-12). When Jesus returns, every faithful believer will be declared righteous.

With the judgment of the faithful completed, Jesus turns his attention to those who remain. His words sting the ears. In light of his holiness, this judgment is the only judgment possible. Since the beginning of time, God has promised that the wicked would not go unpunished. On this final day, all the world will know what that means when Jesus says: *Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41 NIV).

God never intended for people to go to hell. Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. But in their sinfulness, people have turned their backs on God and worshiped gods of their own creation. People have ignored God's mandate to love him above everything else and to love their neighbors as themselves. In their self-centered rejection of God and the salvation he has provided, these people have chosen the condemnation they will receive.

Now, let's turn our attention to ourselves and our church. What does Jesus' description of the Last Day have to say to us? This reading has a good deal to say to us and what it has to say might be a little disturbing. Are you ready?

I said earlier that good works won't get you to heaven and that's true. The only path to salvation is Jesus Christ and his atonement of our sins. However, we are called to be disciples of Christ. A disciple is one who follows his master's teaching. Jesus told us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Not a suggestion but the second of the two great commandments.

In the book of James, God tells us that faith without works is dead. What does that mean? That means that if we truly have faith, that faith will express itself in our actions. If we are truly followers of Christ, then we will naturally be doing the things that Jesus did. And we know from the Bible, that Jesus led a life of good works for the benefit of all those around him.

Let's look once more at the judgment of the wicked. The list of their offenses went like this: *I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 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* (Mt 25:42-43 NIV).

Do you see anything strange about this? We usually think about people sinning against God by the things they do. But these people are being condemned, not for what they

did, but for what they didn't do. Sins of omission are just as serious as sins of commission. Jesus uses this depiction of the Last Day to make that point. If you read the two parables that precede this account of Judgment Day, you'll see the same point being made. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the foolish virgins were shut out because of their failure to get oil and be prepared. In the parable of the talents, the servant who was thrown out was the one who did nothing with the treasure his master had entrusted to him.

Now, let's ask the hard questions. What are we doing with what our Lord has given us? We have personal resources of time, talent, and finance. What are we doing with them? Are we making the best use of our time, talents, and treasures to aid our brothers and sisters who are less fortunate? We have the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What are we doing with it? Are we constantly seeking new and innovative ways of sharing the Gospel with the lost?

If we are going to live the way Jesus lived, the way Jesus wants us to live, we must do everything we can. If we are to be sheep and not goats, we must always be about the work the Savior left for us to do. Faithfulness calls for action and the call for action is a call on each one of us.

The good news is it's never too late. If you haven't been a faithful witness in the past, you can begin witnessing today. If you haven't shared God's blessings with those less fortunate, it's not too late the need still exists. God loves the faithful work of his people and he will accept the work you do today without giving a thought to what or who you were yesterday.

It is my sincere prayer that, beginning today, you will do whatever you can to make your King proud of you, so when he returns you'll hear: *Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world* (Mt

25:34 NIV).