

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

“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.’”

When you look at the final judgment, what does will it look like? Listen again to Jesus, “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 the sheep from the goats.”

The final judgment is no private affair. In fact, all the nations are gathered, no one is left out, and all are before the throne of God. What happens is made clear and Jesus doesn’t mince any words. All is made public. The sheep are revealed to all as sheep and the goats revealed to all as goats. Jesus said, “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. 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.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘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 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.’”

The Judge proclaims for all to see that these on his right, the sheep, lived as his people. Note how this isn’t the basis for the judgment, this Kingdom had been prepared for them before the foundation of the world. They are righteous on account of faith as the Scriptures teach throughout. So, one is saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone? Absolutely. So, God rewards Christians for their good works? Yes, he does. Both of those statements are true because the Bible teaches both of those things. Jesus commends the sheep. Jesus tells you in John’s Gospel what it means to be his sheep. He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Sheep follow their shepherd and where he leads. His word teaches you as you hear it as his sheep. They lived as sheep doing what they had been given to do. God delights in your good works. He takes pleasure in the things you do in faith toward your neighbor. These specific examples of giving food to a hungry person, drink to thirsty, and visiting the sick and in prison are just a few of these things.

The surprise for them is not that they were doing these good things but rather they were doing them to Jesus. Christians do good works. They love as Christ loves them; this is what Christians do. Taking care of God’s servants and his people is what Christians do as they are taught according to God’s word, specifically where they have been instructed by God’s law in the various vocations they live.

This is one of the things that is different between sheep and goats. Sheep have a different relationship to God’s law. For the sheep they see their sin and the accusation of God’s law to be sure but clinging in faith to Christ they have salvation. From that saving faith flows a new life and now, in their new man, they see God’s law as teaching them and lighting the way of what is their new life, worked by the Holy Spirit, flowing from the forgiveness of Christ. Each little thing they do according to this pleases God and is glorious in sight. It’s not for their salvation because that is only received through faith in Christ alone, but it is still pleasing and good. God will say to sheep what he says to them in this reading, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” In this way God does judge you according to our “works” but the righteousness of Christ has covered your sin and you have nothing but good works on account of Christ and do not stand condemned.

So, in this context today, who are these brothers Jesus is speaking about in the Gospel reading? In Galatians 6 we hear, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” The church is the place where this happens first as God’s people listen to his word and take care of one another. “Brother” Jesus speaks

about is a churchly term. He uses it mainly of the apostles and pastors and then it is used of other believers. Another example of this is when people listen to God's servants, his pastors, when they hear them, they hear Jesus. Taking care of the pastors was an important thing along with other Christians. The church is not separated from Jesus nor is it separated from God's people. Sheep hear the voice of their Shepherd, and they gather as God's flock, the church. From the church, then this extends out into the world. You serve your neighbor, inside the church and out and serve Christ.

Take delight too in where God has placed you in this world and do not spurn these callings. First and foremost, you are hearer of the word of God for without God's word you do not have Christ and his benefits. Then look at where you are in your families and listen to the instruction of God about what it means to be a husband, father, brother, sister, or whatever station you have in this estate. Finally look at your neighbors around you outside of your family and see where God has placed you to serve him and confess the faith as salt and light in the world. Do all these things intentionally as ones who know Christ and know what has been won for you.

What about the goats? Listen again to what Jesus says, "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. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 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.' 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?' 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.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." You are warned to not be one of the goats, on the left.

The question you ask yourselves, then, is "what is going on and what is the difference between the sheep and the goats here?" What is Jesus warning you about? But you know, Jesus tells you. Just as his coming judgment is not hidden, it's not hidden why they are divided and why the sheep enter eternal joy and the goats into eternal condemnation. The sheep served Christ, but the goats did not. The sheep are commended for their good works, the goats are condemned for their failure. That's the plain sense of the text. It's what God's word says.

So where does all of this leave you? Well, you don't have to guess. God's judgment isn't some hidden thing to you. You know God's judgment now. There are three judgments you see when you look at the Scriptures, but they are all the same judgment. These judgments are at the cross, the preaching of God's word, and the final judgment. Every year when you hear these readings about the end times and sing the hymns which talk about the Judgment seat of Christ you aren't left scratching your head confused. Neither are you forced to rework the Christian faith because God has somehow changed. God's judgment while being known is also unchanging.

Watch your life and examine what you are fear, love, and trust. Repent. Scoffers stand judged as goats who stand under God's condemnation. The day of judgment for those who reject and mock Christ and his word will be a terrifying day. Listen very closely and do not hesitate to heed what your Lord teaches you. The way of the scoffer is the way of death, eternal death. Do not follow in this foolish way. You are warned by your Lord. The Epistle lesson from 2 Peter teaches this as you heard a few minutes ago, "scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."

Learn from this to lean not on your own understanding and sinful speculations, they will fail you every single time and especially in the end. Your Lord warns you. Don't let the devil, the fallen world, and your own fallen flesh get you to fear something or someone in this world. Don't listen to scoffers who try to speak wisdom while rejecting the Wisdom from on high. God's commands are eternal, clear, and they don't change. The Lord's mandates are far greater and more important than any mandate man may make or try to enforce. Look at the commandments of God and live your life

fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. Trusting in Christ won't put you to shame. Don't follow the goats, follow the Good Shepherd.

Go back to who you are by the grace of God. Jesus doesn't hold the sin of the sheep against them and only recognizes their works. In Romans 4 God says, "David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.'" The sheep are covered in something, it's the righteousness of their Shepherd. They are called as such in the text as well, they are the righteous. Their lives are lived by faith and the works they do come as fruit from the vine to whom they are attached as the branches.

In the Good Shepherd, you have mercy, forgiveness, and life eternal. Trust the promises of Christ that God has made to you in your baptism and which he gives you today in the absolution spoken by your pastor, in his word read and preached to you, and in the Lord's Supper. Take heart and wait together with your fellow saints as God teaches you through the pen of St. Peter, "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."

Dear Christians, be comforted thinking about the end times. This comfort is found in God's judgment of Christ for your sake. When you see this image of the final judgment you know what God will say to you. The reason is because of what happened when God reconciled the world to himself in Christ. Christ crucified is your judgment as the Lord has atoned for your sin and declares you righteous because of Jesus. That judgment is known to you now as you hear God's word preached to you and the Lord works faith to believe it. Your fear, trepidation, and doubt are all cast aside by gazing at Christ crucified for you. Like the Israelites bitten by fiery serpents in the wilderness when they look around them, they saw suffering and death but looking to the serpent on the pole they lived. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." It also points you to the final day to know that you are the redeemed sheep of God.

Rejoice today hearing these things and knowing the wonderful salvation worked for you in Christ. God's judgment is known. His wrath burns against sin and is only justice satisfied in the death of Christ who perfectly lived according to God's law and whose blood shed atones for the sin of the world. Beholding Christ in faith is to stand before the judgment seat of God blameless as his holy people and inheritors of eternal life. What a joyous future, then, to know what belongs to you dear people of God. Your eyes are to the Lord, and you serve him with a glad and willing spirit as his holy people. You serve and seek to love your neighbors all in the name of Christ who became least so that you would be great. The Kingdom of God is not of this world. What it is? "And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." That's the Kingdom of Christ which is his for all eternity. That's the Kingdom which is yours now and what you have as the Son of Man, crucified and risen for you says, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

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