

Matthew 25:31-46. 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.”*

Mindful of Jesus' return, we listen to our Savior's voice.

Consider what our Lord has spared us from

Consider what our Savior's has called us to

The world might end tomorrow! I don't say this to scare you with some wild guess, or to present some estimation about the future based on social and political on-goings as if some mysterious code has suddenly been deciphered. But this is a truth that we are to recognize each and every day, and calls us to live in a way that is mindful of this coming reality.

Jesus tells us to be prepared, be ready, keep watch for his coming, but he doesn't give us a time for his return. And so Jesus prepares us by talking of signs that will appear before his return. He talks of wars and rumors of wars and other signs that the end is near; and all those signs, in one way or another, have been fulfilled. He tells us what to expect when he comes. The Bible tells us that God will put an end to this wicked world and he will create a new heaven and a new earth, and we will have to stand before God, the judge. He tells us that this day of judgment is coming, but he also tells us how he has made us ready, made us right with God, so that we may stand before the judge and live with God for all eternity.

The world might end tonight, tomorrow, next week, it could, it really could! Jesus could return at any moment. This is a major tenant of our faith. We confess these words as part of our

confession of faith: He will come to judge the living and the dead. But do we think through the significance of these words. This Sunday of the Church year is designed for that very purpose, to cause us to pause and consider what this means. It means that we ought to be mindful of the judgment. And so, as we consider how Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead, we ought to consider what our Savior has spared us from, and what our Savior has called us to. Mindful of our Savior's return, we are to listen to his voice.

Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. Despite how much people try to sweep these truths under the rug, or how we ourselves might try to ignore the fact that judgment day is coming, Jesus tells us, more than once, that the day of judgment will happen. Each one of us will have to face our Maker as we stand before him body and soul on the Last Day. And so our Savior prepares us for what that day and what this ever important meeting will involve. He tells us what to expect so that we might be ready for this day of judgment. And so, Jesus tells us that the Son of Man, the same one who came to this earth in humility born of a woman, will come again in all his astounding glory. He will come in glory with all the angels with him and he will sit on his throne, the King of all, will sit in power, ready to judge all people, both the living and the dead. Somehow, someday, all the nations will be gathered before him. But this will not be a people milling about in chaos, disorder, or even in the regular flow of life, everything will stop, and people will give their full attention and, people from everywhere will gather, for a great separation. He will separate the people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep and the goats.

Now, have you ever wondered why Jesus would use this expression? Of course, we think of how Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd and how God uses the image of Shepherd and sheep throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. But this imagery would also certainly be fitting especially because of how these animals are similar, but also very different. And so, there is an element of careful sorting. Jesus will not just open the gate to heaven and just let everyone in. Instead, one by one, Jesus will look over each precious soul, and he will know, and he will declare, who they are, and where they will spend eternity. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him.

This is quite the impressive scene. Jesus in all his glory, all nations gathered before him and Jesus is making this public declaration of judgment. God's Word tells us that no one will escape examination, each one will have to stand before Jesus, and he will know and declare where you will spend eternity! We know from God's Word that we are sinners and that the LORD is the only true God, and he is unmatched in his perfection. We know from God's Word that we will have to stand in his presence. We will have to face his judgment. How can we not shake in terror at even the thought of such a scene? How are we not overcome with doubt and fear when we consider the judgment.? How do we know that we will be spared? How will we know if we will be on the right side of judgment, that we will be spared from the hell and suffering, the destruction that we deserve?

A well-known hymn verse says it this way: *For I know my heart's condition, I also know my Savior's voice.* (By Grace I'm Saved – CW # 384). God's Word tells us that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead, but having heard God's word taught to us and shared with us, through the gospel we know that we are saved by God's grace alone. By his grace, our Savior

sparing us from the punishment of hell that we deserve. Our Savior speaks to us through his holy Word, and time and time again, he assures us that we are his through time and eternity. Through baptism he puts his name on you and tells us, "You are mine." He guides us through life and he promises to take us to be with him forever in heaven. By God's grace we are saved. God does this through the gift of faith. We hear his voice and by the power of the Spirit we believe. We are spared from judgment. We are given eternal life. And this is what our God tells us, the Good Shepherd, says to us, ***God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** Through his Word and Sacrament, he comes to us who were dead in sin, he calls us to faith, he brings us to life, and he makes a new creation. Once lost and condemned creatures, now we are his dearly loved children, and it is all because of that gift of faith. He called out to us with through his Word and Sacrament, he brought us to faith, and therefore one day, he will put us on his right and he will say to us, ***Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*** Notice how Jesus speaks this promise of our eternal salvation, he speaks of it as a gift given to those who are loved. *Come, you who are blessed by my father.* God is the active giver, we did nothing to deserve this, but God has blessed us with this priceless gift. *Take your inheritance,* through faith we are born again, born into the family of God, made his dearly loved children and heirs of eternal life. An inheritance is not something that we earn, but it is something passed down, and certainly in this case it is something that is passed down freely and in love. And this was God's good and gracious will from the beginning of the world that we would be given the free gift of eternal life. God has mercy on us. God looks upon us with a father's love, and therefore he sent Jesus to be our substitute and Savior. God sent his own Son to save us, to stand in our place, to obey all the commands of God, to love God and neighbor, perfectly in our place and die the death that we deserve, so that we would be given the gift of eternal life.

Not only are we spared from judgment, through these words we are spared from guilt. We are spared from the fruitless ways of trying to earn or buy our way into heaven. We are spared from the uncertainty of works righteousness. We are spared from the overwhelming fear of judgment. We are spared even from the fear of death. Instead we have been given the peace that comes from knowing that we are his sheep and he is our shepherd. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He cares for us. He tends to us. He gives us all that we need and we will be safe now and forever in his tender yet capable and powerful hands.

In John chapter 10, Jesus says this about those he has called to faith. ***27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*** However, in this same section of Scripture, he says to unbelievers, the reason that you do not believe, is because you are not my sheep. Among the differences between sheep and goats is that while sheep are so dependent and so trusting in their shepherd, goats are a bit more self-sufficient, and so they are known as an animal that doesn't listen. Yes, sheep may wander, but goats simply are known to go their own way.

And so, with these words Jesus speaks words of warning and words of promise. He tells us in his word that the day is coming that each one of us will stand before a holy God. Judgment is coming, in love the Shepherd warns, but some just do not listen. Jesus says, *Believe in me and*

you will be saved, I have paid for all your sins, I have come to give you life and peace and the free gift of eternal life, and yet there are those who continue to go their own way. They remain in their unbelief, they remain lost and condemned creatures, destined only for ruin, for eternal destruction.

It would only follow that those who refused to listen their Savior's voice concerning eternity, they would also fail to pay attention to the life that he was calling them to live. Those who fail to listen to their Savior, live lives that reflect their own sinful values because that is all that they know. They listen to their own corrupted hearts. they follow their own desires, their own ideas, their own misguided ways. And even if unbelievers happen to do the things that their Shepherd was asking them to do, it was not done in faith, it was not done in response to their Savior's voice. They did not listen. And therefore, on the last day, because they failed to acknowledge Jesus he will not acknowledge them and the things that they did. Instead, Jesus will say, ***"Depart from me, you who are cursed in the eternal fire"***.

Our Savior is calling. He is warning us of the judgement. Let us listen to our Savior's voice. In his grace and mercy, he warns us of the coming day of judgment and so let us be ready and prepared. In his grace and mercy, he tells us that we are saved by grace alone, let us listen with awe-filled thankfulness to this wonderful declaration. And mindful of the judgment and mindful of his mercies which are new every morning, let us hear and follow our Savior's voice as he calls us to live out our lives in love to God and to our neighbor. Lives rooted in his love will produce the types of selfless and godly behavior that Jesus describes, things that will simply flow out of us without much effort or thought because we know our Savior's love, we know what pleases our God and Savior, we know our Savior's voice.

As we consider how that great day of Judgment is coming, we will also take care to listen and follow our God's instruction each and every day. One bit of instruction that summarizes how we are to live in these last comes from 2 Peter 3. The LORD speaks through his apostle and we would do well to listen to the warning, the promise, and the instruction found in this portion of God's Word from 2 Peter 3:10-15. ***But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.***

The end of the world could come at any time. Let us be prepared. We know the he has wiped away all our sins and yet in his goodness he tells us that he will remember the things that we do if faith. Let us hear our Savior's voice and we know that he hears us when we pray: *Lord, help us listen to our Savior's voice. It is a voice that tells us that we are saved. It is a voice that instructs us how to live at peace with you and in love toward our fellow man, until that day that you bring us home. Come, Lord, Jesus. Amen.*