

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**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. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' <sup>40</sup> 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.' <sup>41</sup> "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. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> 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.' <sup>44</sup> 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?' <sup>45</sup> 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.' <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Is there a particular day of the year in which the people in your life think especially of you? At the very least, I'm sure your Birthday could qualify as such a day. In and around your Birthday you might receive cards or presents or a phone call which lets you know those people close to you care. But there's other days too for many people—like Mother's Day, Father's Day—two days in which if you're a Mother or a Father, there's probably at least a few people thinking about you. Perhaps Veterans' Day is another one of those days for some of you.

Well, Jesus clearly deserves a special day too. Are there any days on which the people of the world think especially about Him? Of course, we could think of Christmas as maybe the most obvious day. Although Christmas is constantly under attack, even non-Christians generally understand that holiday has something to do with Jesus. And then in that same vein—Good Friday, Easter—a couple other days in which many people, thankfully, are still thinking about the Savior. But there is one special day in which all people, both dead and living, will be thinking about Jesus. And that will be Judgment Day. It'll be a special day for Jesus, will it be a special day for you? That's the question we'll be answering in our text, and I'm sure you'll find, it is a day that you can look forward to. The theme we'll be considering this morning is:

## **Judgment Day is Jesus' Special Day**

- I. The Day of Jesus' Glory
- II. The Day of Jesus' Justice
- III. The Day of Jesus' Joy

This Thursday is Thanksgiving, and you know what that means, don't you? It means we're going to start seeing a lot more Christmas decorations real soon. Christmas songs will be playing on the radio, at the stores, Christmas trees will start appearing in people's windows. We're also going to start seeing a lot of nativity scenes around town, probably even in your own houses. Now, although those nativity sets try to dress up the whole occasion with the peaceful animals and the carefully cultivated bed of straw, let's not lose sight of what we're looking at. It was a barn. It was probably rather noisy with lots of animal bleating. It would not have been a tidy stable, because that's where the animals lived. Had the angels not told the shepherds who that Baby was that was laid in the manger, they would not have suspected this Child was God Himself.

The reality of the manger scene reflects our Savior's humility. He came without pomp or circumstance, there were no markings on Him or His mother to make them stand out in any way. Despite what many manger scenes show, there were no halos hovering over their heads. And we know that the rest of Jesus' life followed the same humble pattern. That's what Isaiah was prophesying about, when he wrote, **"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him."** (Isaiah 53:2)

But that won't be the case on Judgment Day, oh no. Judgment Day is Jesus' Special Day, it will be the day of His glory. Our text says, **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne."** That day will be very different from His first appearing. Then it was a small voice crying nestled in His mother's arms, but on Jesus' Day He will come down with a voice thundering and with the trumpets of heaven signaling His arrival. Back then His arrival was announced to a few shepherds who then gathered around Him, but on Jesus' Day every single person that has ever lived will be gathered before Him and every eye will behold Him as He is.

How different that day will be from the day in which we live. Right now, we're all well acquainted with the people who mock Jesus—who blaspheme Him, who wag their tongues at God and declare He doesn't exist. Those mouths will be shut up on Jesus' Day. On that day, it will be as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, **"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** (Philippians 2:10-11) On that day there will not be a tongue in God's creation that can do anything but confess that Jesus is God. It will be undeniable on the Day of Jesus' Glory.

But He's not just returning in order to prove His glory, Judgment Day is Jesus' Special Day, for it will be the day of Jesus' Justice. Gone will be the days of Jesus humbly accepting injustice, as He did when He was stripped and mocked and beaten and crucified. No, that day will be the day for Jesus' Justice, and that takes up the bulk of our text this morning. Now, this is sometimes referred to as the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, but it's not a parable—not at all. There's only one picture, that's the sheep and the goats part, but it's simply used to illustrate how God will separate the people of this world. This entire account is Jesus giving us an accurate play-by-play account of narrative what we can expect on Judgment Day.

And it's good to know what's going to happen. You know, so often, people guess about what happens after death. But we don't need to guess, there's no doubt about what's going to happen on that day, because Jesus spells it all out here. To each of you, Jesus will pronounce His just judgment. He will say either, **"Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,"** or He will say, **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."** Everyone in this church today will receive one of those two options, God's blessing or God's cursing, and so obviously, we need to know on what basis He will make this distinction! How will the Judge judge us?

And people have a lot of guesses about how this will work. Pretty much every religion around the world presents this decision like this: you have a scale, and you pile up your good deeds over here and your bad deeds over here, and whichever one weighs more that's the outcome. Or else, it's hypothesized that as long as we get better every day, as long as we're trying to improve, well then *that's* good enough. And Christians can fall into this mindset too. It's easy to think that perhaps if I go to church at least a good chunk of the time and throw a few bucks in the plate, well then God will be happy with me. But that's not how this Judge will judge.

Now, we have a fish at home, or I should say we had a fish, it died the middle of this past week. It's still in its bowl, because I'm trying to figure out what I should do with it. I was thinking that maybe we could have a little burial for it with the boys and use it sort of as a teaching moment about death. But then I was wrestling with what I would say at a fish's funeral. What could I say? I suppose something along the lines of, "It was a good fish, it enjoyed swimming in its bowl and always ate most of its food"? I don't really know what else I could say. But as I was preparing this sermon and thinking about our fish, it struck me that that's really how most

funerals go, don't they? Everyone goes up front and talks about how nice the person was, how helpful they were, how they'd give you the shirt off their back, that type of thing. There's usually never any mention of the bad times, it's only glowing terms. And this approach to death and funerals really reflects how most people think Jesus is going to talk about the dead on Judgment Day. This is how people think Jesus will judge.

And really, as we read through our text, it almost sounded like that's what Jesus is going to do on Judgment Day! He points to the righteous and talks about all the good things they did, He points to the unrighteous and talks about all the bad things they did. But notice, with the righteous, Jesus talks about them as if they've only ever done good things, and about the unrighteous as if they'd never done one nice thing for anyone else at all. So is Jesus really saying that He's going to judge the world on this basis? How much good we've done—or really—whether or not we'd been totally perfect?

Absolutely not. And I'll give you three reasons why. First, on the basis of this criteria, no one at all would go to heaven. No one! Because no one is perfect, the Bible itself even says, ***“There is no one righteous, no not one.”*** (Romans 3:10) The Bible tells us that ***“All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.”*** (Romans 3:23) So who are these righteous people that only ever did good? There is no one who meets this standard, and yet the Bible tells us that there will be people in heaven. Revelation says there will be ***“A great multitude which no one could number.”*** (Revelation 7:9)

The second reason we know that Jesus isn't saying He will judge people on the basis of their works is that it contradicts everything else Jesus has said about this matter. His entire ministry He's been saying the opposite. Every passage that speaks about how we are saved by grace alone, how He's the one who seeks us and finds us, how He came to save sinners—you'd have to throw them right out if Jesus is saying our actions save us.

And the third reason why we know that's not what this text is saying is because that's simply NOT what this text is saying. Perhaps a cursory read through makes it seem that way, but let's look at it closer. Who are they who will be entering eternal life with God? Jesus addresses them as, ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father.”*** This word blessed is a perfect passive participle in Greek, so Jesus' point is, “At some point in the past, you were blessed, and that blessing remains.” That's what the force of that verb means. You were set apart by God through His blessing, and it was not you that was setting yourself apart. And as we continue on with Jesus' words, this becomes clearer. He says, ***“Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*** Inherit. When do we receive inheritances? When our parents die, and we receive them simply because we are their children. Jesus never carelessly spoke, and this proclamation that the Kingdom of Heaven is our inheritance is the perfect description of why we go to heaven. We inherit eternal life, because someone else died—namely Jesus. Oh, and when was this Kingdom prepared? ***“From the foundation of the world.”*** Before our physical world was even created, much less before you had been born or done anything good at all, God prepared an eternal home for you.

On top of that, look at the contrast between this blessing and then the cursing that Jesus will pronounce. You know, so much of this judgment is parallel, almost every single thing that Jesus says to the righteous, He says the opposite to the unrighteous. ALMOST everything. There are two key differences, and when everything else is so parallel, Jesus is using those differences to stand out as beacons of an important truth. Notice to the righteous, He says, ***“You blessed of my Father,”*** but He does not say, ***“You cursed of my Father.”*** God is left out of the cursing, it's just ***“You cursed.”*** The point is, that even though God is ultimately the one that curses souls to hell, it is not what God *wanted* for them. He did not choose this for them. The other difference bears this out: He says to the righteous, ***“Inherit the kingdom prepared for you,”*** but He does not say to the unrighteous, ***“Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for you.”*** He calls it ***“The eternal fire prepared for the devil and his evil angels.”*** Hell was never intended for humans.

So we see in all of this, the just judgment of Christ Jesus, it is entirely a judgment on the basis of grace. ***“God our Savior desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** (1 Timothy 2:4) Those

who will inherit eternal life—it's an inheritance, given freely, declared from eternity, a blessing from the hand of our gracious God. Not earned, but freely given. The cursing to hell, not what God wants at all, but the result of the rejection of God's grace.

Our reaction to all of this shows our faith or unbelief. And our reactions to all of this are borne out in our actions. How we live, that's the evidence of what is in here. That's really what's going on in this courtroom scene. All of these good deeds presented, they're submitted merely as evidence of underlying faith. Notice how the righteous react when they're told they had done all this good, they're incredulous. "He must have the wrong person, I didn't do any of that!" For a believer will do these good works without even a thought, and certainly without expectation of any reward. Whereas the unbeliever, when they're told to depart, wants to say, "Hey, what about everything I had done."

Well, what about what we have done? Do you see yourself in this group of the righteous? Sure, you believe in Jesus as your Savior, but still, does that description sound like it could possibly be describing you? If you have any doubts about that, well, Jesus sees you in this picture. This IS the way that Jesus describes you. It's not that He's just failing to mention your failures. It's not that He missed a few pages in your book. It's not that He's treating this as your funeral and only wants to talk about the good times. It is the case, however, that in God's eyes, when it comes to you there is only the good. For you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Your sin that you regularly feel clinging to you, it has been carried away. It's not that you've earned this, but Christ earned it, and it is your inheritance. On Jesus' Day, it will be the day of His justice. And in His just judgment you've received the invitation to life with Him.

And be assured, this is a proclamation that Jesus makes with gladness. For on Judgment Day, it will be the Day of Jesus' Joy. When I was in college, I used to really struggle with this idea that Jesus could be joyful to welcome me into heaven. I would read a section of Scripture like this, and it would terrify me. I would think about what side I certainly deserved to be on. I would understand that because Jesus died for my sins it meant I got to join the sheep entering eternal life. But I couldn't help but be stuck with the feeling that as Jesus looked joyfully as everyone else passed through those pearly gates, that He just wouldn't feel the same about me. That I was the one that just got through on a loophole, by the skin of my teeth, the black sheep of heaven. And I mean, how could He rejoice to be stuck with me for eternity? Well, somewhere along the line in college, I heard a really good sermon that set me straight and got that notion out of my head. And I want to remove that notion from your head too if that's one you share.

You can take comfort in this text because of the blessed invitation that Jesus is extending to you. Look at that one beautiful word with which your Savior invites you. "**Come.**" Jesus says to you, "**Come.**" To Jesus, that is such a precious word. That was His invitation when He said, "**Come, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:28) It's the way He called His beloved close friends, His disciples, "**Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**" (Matthew 4:19) It's the invitation He sent out through the prophets, "**Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.**" (Isaiah 55:1)

And He will say it one more time, to you. "**Come.**" There's no hint of sorrow in that word. No hint of regret from your Savior's lips. "**Come.**" Come away with Me. Come away from this evil world. Come away from your sorrow and toils. Come away from your sin and guilt. Come away from death and politics and pandemics. Come to my home, which is now yours. "**Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the World.**" Yes, Judgment Day will be Jesus' Special Day. It will be the day of His glory. It will be the day of His justice. It will be the day of His joy. And it will be the day of your joy, as you leave behind death and sadness, Jesus opening to you the doors of joy and gladness. For from your sins you have been set free. You are the righteous ones, God's dear children, the inheritors of eternal life. Amen.

**"And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding will guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.