

Last Sunday in the Church Year

November 22, 2020

St. Matthew 25:31-46:

## **“This World’s Last Moment”**

- I. The “What” and “When” Parts
- II. The Who Part.
- III. The Last Moment.

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St Matthew 25:31-46

Dear Friends in Christ,

1946 was barely a breath after the end of World War II. It was the year the movie "It's A Wonderful Life" made its debut. In spite of its 74 years, it has been a Christmas classic for TV audiences - at least, until recently.

There's that one scene where the guardian angel, Clarence Odbody, is commissioned to go to earth to help a man named George Bailey whose life had been, as we say, turned inside out. The senior angel said to Clarence, "A man down on earth needs our help." Clarence responded with, "Splendid. Is he sick?" The senior Angel replied, "No, worse. He's discouraged."

I'm thinking that many, maybe most, are feeling that way. People discouraged by what has unfolded on earth during this year - and wondering and fearful of what's to come. But something else came to mind; Jesus' words: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." (Matt. 24:21) That statement moves us beyond the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and contradicts the notion that God's people will be raptured out before things get real bad.

The only way anyone can conclude that God's people will escape the end time upheaval is by preferred ignorance, especially in light of the great suffering the church has endured and is enduring. Of course, few people really listen to Jesus, and the world spends lots of money and effort to get rid of Him and His church. But it will listen to Him - very clearly - on The Last Day!

This is The Last Sunday of The Church Year. We are to consider . . .

## THIS WORLD'S LAST MOMENT

### I. The "What" and "When" Parts.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. (v. 31)

I was introduced to Shakespeare in High School. I can't say that reading Shakespeare was a favorite but I was quite impressed by this statement from Macbeth: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more." Even many world worshipers who want to get rid of Christ, who mock the Bible and torment the faithful church know that something is terribly wrong - getting worse - and it all has to end somewhere...sometime...somehow.

We must take the words of Jesus to heart, as never before. It will help curb all the questions as to why what is happening is happening:

"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves (that is, the noise, the insanity, the turmoil, the upheaval of humanity), people fainting with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." (Lk. 21:25-27)

How could a student of Scripture miss it: *Distress...fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world.*? But take a good hold on what Jesus says next: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Lk. 21:28) Dear friends, I say the ***what is coming on the world*** is here. The ***when these things begin to take place*** is behind us.

## II. The Who Part.

And then comes the how part; how will people be effected by His coming:

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. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 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.' (vv.23,33)

Concerning the fact that Jesus separates the sheep from the goats according to what they have done, as we read earlier in our text for this morning, works are the evidence of faith; faith that holds on to Jesus as the one Who paid for our sin and secured eternal life for us. As John reveals in the Book of Revelation, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'" (Rev. 14:13) For the child of God works follow, not precede. Again, they are the evidence of faith. They do not pay for sins; original or actual. They do not merit God's favor.

The Apostle Paul writes, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Gal. 3:11) And, of course: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8,9)

For those who reject Christ, the motive for works is always self-justification. By nature, people do good works because they're expected, or because they make the person look good or feel good, or because the person is being watched, or because the person will merit something. And yet, in spite of such motives, humanity has persistently entered into the fulfillment of God's warning through Isaiah:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil (we see this happening everywhere in every way), who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! (Is. 5:20,21)

The Albrecht's write:

The whole point of judgment is that some are saved and others are not. This theme has been consistently presented throughout Jesus' teaching ministry. Although we live in an age that prizes diversity and tolerance, the sad truth is that not all people will be saved. (Albrecht, *People's Bible Commentary, Matthew*, Saint Louis, CPH, 2005, pp. 367-368)

## III. The Last Moment.

Who knows? The last moment could be...any moment. We take to heart these words of the Apostle Peter: "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 1:10-11)

A long time ago, back in the Old Testament times, God sent the prophet Azariah to speak to and encourage King Asa, one of the kings of Judah. Azariah said to King Asa, "The Lord is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." (2 Chron. 15:2b)

Azariah then said to King Asa, "For a long time Israel was without the true God...great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed

by nation and city by city..." (2 Chron. 15:3-6b) And then God revealed through Azariah one of the most startling insights that is revealed throughout Scriptures, but mostly ignored because most don't want to hear the truth, in spite of the fact that human wisdom is no closer to resolving its monotonous rounds of upheaval that have plagued its history from the very beginning. Azariah said, "**for God troubled them with every sort of distress...**" (2 Chron. 15:6b) God troubled them! To get their attention!

Isn't that something? Isn't that what we should be considering in light of all that has been unfolding in this world - this country - the church? *For God troubled them with every sort of distress.* That is lost on a country and most of the church which no longer see the relevance or need of God's Word. But, then again, so are these New Testament words: "God sends them (those who reject the Word of God) a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thess. 2:11-12)

We take with us these words of Azariah to King Asa: "But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded." (2 Chron. 15:7) Or, as Jesus said about God troubling the world today; as was stated earlier in this sermon: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Lk. 21:28) The ***when these things begin to take place*** - the beginning - is behind us. God is moving everything according to His design, not ours.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott