

November 26, 2023

St. Matthew 25:31-33:

“The End Will Come”

I. It Will.

II. All Will Be Gathered.

III. Any Moment.

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St. Matthew 25:31-33

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the ESV translation of the Bible, above the 54th verse of St. Luke 12 is the title: "Interpreting the Time." Here are Verses 54-56:

He (Jesus) also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance and sky, but you do not know how to interpret the present time?

Do we? Are any of us still wondering why the things that are happening in this world are happening? Are any of us still longing for an improved earth, thinking things will get better? I pray we know the words of Jesus regarding the movement to the end; they're screaming in our faces:

...you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake...many will fall away...and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray...lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold...the one who endures will be saved...this gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world...then the end will come (verses from Matthew 24:9-14).

It would be good if we pay more attention to Jesus' Words than the fantasies of Media or celebrity, or the thinking that human wisdom will solve our problems when, in fact, it has never - I'll say it again - **never!** - moved us one inch closer to solving corruption, violence, war, dying and death. Oh, we've invented an incredible technology, but where is it taking us? Jesus, God in the flesh, said it . . .

THE END WILL COME

I. It Will.

This day is officially the Last Sunday of the Church Year, the Sunday before the First of four Sundays of Advent; Advent meaning "coming"; This in preparation for the celebration of Christ's First Coming - His birth - Christmas.

I'm not a student of Shakespeare, but I've always liked his words, "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 those who want the Christ and His Word out of the presence are fully aware that things are not good - getting worse - and all of it has to end - sometime, somewhere, somehow, and soon. The Words of Jesus are incredibly clear:

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 (humanity's turbulence; its violence and worship of self; its disrespect and indecency; its dishonesty), 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).

Doesn't it add up: "distress...*fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world?*" And then, as Jesus said: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near (Lk.21:28)."
And, as has been said a good number of times: *When these things begin to take place* is well behind us! And so, our text . . .

II. All Will Be Gathered.

"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. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left (Mt.25:32,33)."

The fact that Jesus separates the sheep from the goats according to what they have done must be understood in the sense that works are the evidence of the faith that Christ has done everything to pay for every sin and win eternal life for us. We know well the words of Revelation 14:13: "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!'" Deeds, good works, flow from God's love in Christ for them and glorify Christ. They are the evidence of the faith of the sheep. For the goats, works make them look good or feel good; glorifies them. This fits with Jesus' words: "Whoever believes...is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn.3:28)."

III. Any Moment.

And who knows? This morning - any moment - could be the last look at this world for any one of us - for all. So, listen to this word from 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 Pt.1:10-11)."

The end of another church year points us to the end of everything in and with this world. The simple fact is that God wants us to be ready and to understand that everything that's happening in this world was foreknown and is watched by Him. He uses and moves all things according to His will.

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 and a descendant of King David. 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 Asa, and please listen carefully, "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 the Scriptures, but mostly ignored because most are comfortable with ignorance; ignored by the world, by America and, I believe, most of what calls itself Christian. Nobody wants to hear the truth: "**for God troubled them with every sort of distress...**(2 Chron. 15:6b)."

Isn't that something? Isn't that what we should be considering in light of all that's unfolding in this world - this country - the church? *For God troubled them with every sort of trouble.* This comes from the Lord God who says. "For I the Lord do not change...(Mal.3:6)."

It appears that this has been lost on much of the church which no longer sees the relevance or need of Scripture. But, then again, so are these New testament words: "God sends them (those who reject the Gospel; 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)." Frightening, isn't it?

We hold on to these words of Azariah to King Asa: "But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for you shall be rewarded (2 Chron. 15:7). Or, as Jesus said about God troubling the world today: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (Lk.21:28)."

The noted Lutheran theologian of the 17th century, John Gerhard wrote of those eternally

condemned:

“They are in hell...This expresses every kind of torture since in hell there is the presence of all evil, and the absence of all good...For they are burned, not lightly and superficially, but in the midst of flames penetrating *ad medullas* (that is, to the marrow)... Their sorrow is increased by the remembrance of former good...They know their punishment is eternal...They will be tortured by the pains of their kindred, that a gulf is fixed, for when the rich man wants his brethren warned, he does this, not from love and desire of their salvation, but from fear and terror, lest his pains be increased by the sight of those prepared for them.” (Heinrich Schmid, Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augsburg Publish House, Minneapolis, p. 634).

Then Gerhard writes of eternal life; of those in Heaven:

“It is the most blessed and felicitous (pleasing) state of the godly...they will see God face to face, and, free from every trouble, will live and reign in eternal joy and glory, and in ineffable felicity (indescribable happiness), but in the infirmity of this life cannot be known *specifically and exactly*, because ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man the things God hath prepared for them that love Him,’ Is. 64:4; I Cor. 2:9.” (Ibid, p. 660).

The point? All will be gathered at any moment; ***The End Will Come***. Praise God! Are we ready?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott