

St. Matthew 25:31-33

Dear Friends in Christ,

Well, there they are: the words of Jesus which are increasing in volume; really, screaming at us!

...then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:10-14)

Let's see: These things are no longer things to come. They are now. The massive falling away of church people. The massive number of false prophets. Lawlessness. The need for endurance. And, oh yes, the gospel has been proclaimed throughout the whole world, which explains the global denunciation of it!

We're here to examine . . .

THE LAST

I. What?

The church year calendar calls this Sunday the *Last Sunday of the Church Year*. This is the Sunday before the beginning of the Advent Season, followed by Christmas.

Frank E. Wilson wrote:

"The word 'Advent' means 'coming' and refers to the coming of our Lord on Christmas day.

"But there is also another side to it. As our Lord came once, He will come again. As there was a first Advent, so there will also be a second." (Frank E. Wilson, *An Outline of the Christian Year*, Morehouse-Barlow Co., New York, 1967, P. 23)

And that's our direction this morning. The Last Sunday of the Church Year directs us to the Last Day - the Second Advent.

II. When?

Our text is entitled *The Final Judgment* and begins with these words from 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..." (vss. 31-32a)

I don't consider myself Shakespearean, but these words are quite appropriate: "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 *worldlings* who want to get rid of Christ, mock the Bible, torment the faithful church are aware that things are not good - getting worse - and it all has to end somewhere...sometime...somehow...maybe soon. Each of us should take the words of Jesus to heart as never before - burn them in our minds - carry them with us each day:

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, 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 of nations...fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world.*”? And then 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) It would appear that the “when these things **begin** to take place” part is behind us.

III. Who?

“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.” (vss. 32-33)

Concerning the thought that Jesus separates the sheep from the goats according to what they have done we must always remember that works are the evidence of faith for the child of God. 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 - they are the evidence of faith.

For those who reject Christ, the claim that works deserve God's love and forgiveness is arrogance and a denial that Christ's work of redemption alone is necessary! And all this fits with Jesus' Word: “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. 3:18) Works do not pay for sin. That's what Jesus did.

God's Word is clear: “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 this: “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)

In their commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel, the Albrechts write:

The whole point of the 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. Some people will go to hell. (Albrecht, *People's Bible Commentary, Matthew*, Saint Louis, CPH, 2005, pp. 367-368).

IV. Look.

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

The end of another church year draws us to the end of everything of this world. We want to be ready. The fact is, God wants us to be ready. And the fact is also this: everything that's happening to this world is being directed by the great Triune God.

A long time ago, back in the Old Testament times, God sent Azariah to speak to and encourage King Asa, one of the kings of Judah. And 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 Chronicles 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 the Scriptures, but mostly ignored because most prefer the ignorance; ignored by the world, by America and, I believe, ignored by most of what calls itself Christian. Azariah said, “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 distress.*** Somehow, that's been lost on a country and most 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)

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 this 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)

It's well on the way. ***The Last.***

Amen.

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St. Matthew 25:31-33: “The Last”

I. What?

II. When?

III. Who?

IV. Look.

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