

Last Sunday of the Church Year

““The Final Separation”

(Matthew 25:31-34)”

November 26, 2023

Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Last Sunday of the Church Year is from our Gospel reading Matthew 25:33-35.

**“31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:”**

So far the text...

Our text begins with the word “When”. **“When the Son of Man comes in His glory...”**

It doesn’t begin with the word “if”, or “supposing that” the Son of Man comes in His glory... as if there were a possibility that He might not. No, Jesus speaks to His disciples on the Mount of Olives on Tuesday of Holy Week with certainty. The day will come, as we heard two weeks ago, as a thief in the night. No one will know the day, but it will come. That is not up for debate.

So also, it was not up for debate what was going to happen to Jesus in a few days on Good Friday. For He told the Pharisees clearly ahead of time what they were going to do to Him in John 8.

**“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.”**

It is only because this “when” was fulfilled, --this when of humiliation and death on the cross, that the final “when” of Jesus coming in glory is a day of comfort for the believer and not a day of fear.

On that final day, when that day does indeed come, there are only words of a cheerful command that are uttered by the Jesus to His sheep, to His believers in Him.

**‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:’**

The created world in which you toiled and suffered, and which Jesus overcame will be no more. But the kingdom of glory remains. Jesus prepared this kingdom for you by His death and resurrection. So 1 Peter 1 tells us:

**“18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”**

All the believers since the beginning of time are gathered at Jesus right hand. They have been blessed by the Father with their redemption by the blood of the Lamb and so Jesus can simply say to them, “Come”. Take what is yours. Take your inheritance. Jesus gives to His sons and daughters what is theirs.

On this last day, all that is corruptible is separated from the believers. All that is sinful and evil is no longer present. The sheep battled their sinful flesh but remained faithful to the end. Their deeds were not perfect. Our deeds are not perfect. As Paul said in Romans 7:

**“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

Jesus did! The sheep believed that Jesus did this for the world. As Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5.

**“that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”**

The sheep, you and I have believed and are justified. We live with Jesus’ deliverance all the days of our earthly lives. We have been promised the heavenly places as we know from Ephesians 1.

**“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will”**

And on the last day, we will be forever, finally, separated from our evil nature.

But, also on that last day, the believers who lived in this corrupt world among the goats who rejected Jesus will finally be separated from it. All the daily evils in the world ...of hostages and massacres and looting and the profaning of things that are holy...all that will be separated from the sheep forever as they enter the kingdom of heaven where there is no evil. The sheep take heart in Jesus words from John 17.

**“14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” (John 17:14-18)**

And that’s where we are right now, isn’t it. Still in this world with a purpose. We have been committed the word of reconciliation to give to the unbelieving world. We have been sent into the world with Jesus’ Word of truth. For God does not want anyone to lost. He doesn’t want anyone on His left hand on that last day. And neither do we.

While there is time yet God sends us to use our talents, to love as we have been loved in the simplest of ways...feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, including our enemies, clothing the naked, visiting the those in prison. These are the simple acts of love that all sheep do, because when we do them, we do them to Jesus. We show love to Jesus who first loved us! It is the evidence of the faith that lives in the sheep's hearts that Jesus points to on the last day.

“When” did we do these acts of love the sheep ask? There's that word “when” again. They did them imperfectly, so imperfectly that they cannot remember them. But they were made holy by the blood of the Lamb and so He remembers them. He remembers their sins no more, only their acts of love purified by the blood of the Lamb.

Through acts of love, the unbelieving world is awakened to wonder why the sheep live this way. And that is when the sheep tell of the Savior of the world, as the shepherds did who saw the baby Jesus. And through the word, God creates faith in the unbeliever's heart to turn from sin and believe in the Lamb who washed the world's sins away.

Unfortunately there will be those goats who reject Jesus' as the Savior. And without faith in Him, their deeds remain sinful, completely lacking any merit, and are unworthy of praise only condemnation. They were not done in love to Jesus. “When” is their answer. When did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked, or sick? The “when” is their life's work of unbelief, of rejection of Jesus. And now they must stand on their own merits which are completely empty of any goodness. They hear the command to depart from His presence.

Yes, sadly it is the goats' final separation from God, His loving presence. And they depart into the presence of the devil and all torment and fire forever. But the righteous into eternal life.

**“My little children,”** John writes in his epistle, my little sheep, **“these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”**

We live each day with our Advocate Jesus Christ, the Righteous. We live knowing that “When” He returns, He will advocate for us and call us into His eternal kingdom. We live each day sharing the good news of our Advocate for not only us, but for the sins of the whole world, that today’s goats would repent and by the power of the Holy Spirit, become His sheep.

Amen.

**“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**