

Judgment Day!

Psalm 95 1 John 1:5-2:2 Matthew 25:31-46

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Judgment Day is coming ... and it is coming soon! Jesus teaches us that we are to **watch and pray, be alert and ready** for His return on the **Last Day**. All the **Signs of the End** that the Scripture tells us to look for are occurring¹ ... everyday, all the time. The signs of the end are the **handwriting on the wall** to show us that **Judgment Day** is truly coming and it's coming fast. There is always an urgency when Jesus teaches about the **Last Day**, He wants us to be eagerly sitting on the edge of our seats ready for it to happen at any moment.

☺ For us as Christians, for those who have been declared righteous and forgiven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is **NO FEAR** whatsoever in **Judgment Day**. We know the Judge and we know His verdict --- in fact you have been hearing His verdict throughout your life. The verdict is this: *Your sins are forgiven in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

You hear **Absolution** every week in worship; you have already been declared **NOT GUILTY** by the Judge through faith in His Son Jesus Christ². That is why we look forward to **Judgment Day** with great joy; for us it's more like **homecoming day** and a great **family reunion!**

☹ For the unbeliever though, there is **incredible fear** and **great dread** about **Judgment Day**. The unbeliever has rejected the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior from sin. Jesus is the only One who can rescue us from the

¹ See Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 for a good summary of these "Signs of the End". They include wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and natural disasters, famine and disease, persecution of Christians, false teachers in the church; and the most important sign, the preaching of the Gospel to into all nations!

² In Scripture, the legal term that means "not guilty!" is Righteousness. For instance: 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." You are righteous (= declared "not guilty!" by God the Judge) through faith in Christ; **never** by your own good work, effort, money, or merit.

Wrath of God on **Judgment Day**. The unbeliever rejects this; they toss Jesus aside; they do not believe His promises; they even despise Him, ridicule His Word, and are hostile to His People. For unbelievers, **Judgment Day** will be truly **Judgment Day** in the *absolute worst sense* of the word.

Today in the Gospel lesson, Jesus paints us a picture of what **Judgment Day** will be like. It's called the "parable" of the Sheep and the Goats; but it's more like Jesus' eyewitness account of what **Judgment Day** will be like!

It begins immediately with a **separation**: Jesus Himself will **divide** all nations, *and every single person*, into one of two groups: the *sheep* on the right; and the *goats* on the left. **That is the Judgment. The Judge has already made His decision.** The first thing He does is to **separate** those who will go to heaven and those who are condemned to hell. The only difference between the *sheep* and the *goats* is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The *sheep* are God's people, who know and believe that Jesus is the **Good Shepherd** who laid down His life for the *sheep*. They are the ones who trusted in Him during their lifetime; and listened to His Voice; they will now spend eternity with Him in heaven.

The *goats* are those who have rejected Christ; those who hardened their hearts to the Gospel; those who refused to repent of their sins; those who loved the world and its ways. The *goats* rejected Christ during their lifetime; neglected His voice, and they will now spend eternity condemned in hell.

When Jesus comes in His glory, with all the Holy Angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and **He will separate the people** one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Matthew 25:31-33 paraphrase

That separation by the Son of God is the Judgment.

There is no shuffling between groups; it is too late to change your mind and repent of your sins; at this moment there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The rest of the story of *the sheep and the goats* is Jesus showing why some are sheep and why some are goats. **Because we cannot see faith in the heart, Jesus is going to highlight the fruit of faith: the good works or the lack of good works, that we can see.** In the Gospels, Jesus has already taught us this -- *we understand the idea.*

Jesus said, “every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matthew 7:17ff)”

Those who had faith in Christ brought forth good fruit: they were loving and kind to their neighbor; they were compassionate, they were concerned about the physical needs of other people, they were hospitable, they came alongside other people to encourage and help³.

Those who had no faith in Christ brought forth bad fruit: they were unloving and unkind to their neighbor; they were not compassionate, they were not concerned about the physical needs of other people, they were not hospitable, they did not come alongside other people to encourage and help.

It is *absolutely important* to note that this list of good works -- or the lack of good works -- is **NOT** what saved these people; these things simply reflect what was going on in their heart. As Jesus said, “*by their fruits you will recognize them.*”

**If they had faith, then like a good tree,
they would produce good fruit.
If they did not have faith, then like a bad tree,
they produced bad fruit.**

If you mix this up, you can very quickly fall into “works righteousness”, the idea that your good works earn your salvation. If you believe that --> then you are lost and you have rejected Christ the Savior⁴. We are saved by faith in Christ, trusting the Gospel promise that your sins are forgiven because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

³ Be careful not to over-personalize this list of things that Jesus talks about and feel guilty. Jesus is talking to the entire Holy Christian Church, all believers gathered before Him like sheep. As a whole, the Holy Christian Church feeds and clothes the poor, visits the sick, and brings hope to the prisoners. Your prayers and financial support of the Holy Christian Church and the local congregation makes you a partaker of all of these things (see 3 John 8); whether or not you personally, “hands on”, are involved. Jesus isn't listing these things to make you feel guilty; He is listing these things to show that you had true faith in Him. In this story, Jesus just lists 4 good works; there are a **plethora** of other good works that He could have mentioned as well!

⁴ St Paul condemns works righteousness in the book of Galatians; if you believe you can earn your own salvation you are cursed by God (Gal 3) and condemned (Gal 1). Rather, we are saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15)!

Salvation is by grace alone! Faith alone! And Christ alone! **IT IS NEVER BECAUSE OF YOUR OWN WORK.**

Good works come into play after you are saved. After your sins are forgiven, after you believe in Christ, then you will begin to live a holy and godly life according to the commands of God. You will begin to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and you will begin to love your neighbor as Christ has loved you. The Holy Spirit works within you so that things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and faithfulness are seen more and more in your life. Good works come after salvation. They are **never** a part of the conversation when it comes to talking about how you are saved. In that conversation, the only thing that matters is Jesus and His work of salvation for you⁵.

Finally, we need to note the *destinies* of these two groups of people.

☺ The *sheep* inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, just as Jesus promised in His Word! Heaven is a real place, where we will see Christ with our very own eyes in our resurrected and glorified bodies; and we will live with Him in righteousness and blessedness forever and ever. In addition, we will be reunited with our loved ones who have died in faith, never to lose them again. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, the beauty and majesty of what Heaven will be like!

☹ The *goats* – on the other hand – will be condemned to hell; Jesus describes it as an **eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**. Hell is a real place, the harsh reality of it is beyond comprehension. It is a warning to all people – *including us* -- that now is the time to repent! Now is the time to turn from your sins, confess them to God, and believe that you are forgiven because of the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in Jesus now --> while you still have time! The day is coming when it will be too late.

Judgment Day is coming ... and it is coming soon!

Amen!

⁵ Remember that **faith** is not a good work you perform, but a **gift** of God given to you: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)"

Lord Jesus,
the judge of the living and the dead,
the king who will return on judgment day with
all the holy angels,
prepare our hearts for that great and glorious
day.

Keep us steadfast in faith, so that we always
have an attitude of repentance and a hatred of
sin.

We pray for our family and friends who may not
be ready for your return;

and we ask that you send your Holy Spirit to
them to work through your word and
sacraments

to create, strengthen, or nurture their faith.

We pray this by the power of the Holy Spirit
and to the glory of God the father,

Amen!

Psalm 95

1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

3 For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;

7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

1 John 1:5-2:2

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Matthew 25:31-46

The Sheep and the Goats

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and **he will separate** the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' ⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."