

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 25:31-46
November 17th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Righteous into Eternal Life

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who wilt come again in majesty to judge the quick and the dead, and call forth all who sleep in the graves, either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of condemnation: we beseech Thee to be gracious unto us, and to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Thee, and, having been found acceptable in Thy sight, may on the Last Day be raised up to life everlasting, inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, and give Thee glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear friends, if one was to ask any random stranger on the street, “What kind of person goes to heaven?” The answer undoubtedly would be something about being a good person. In the world’s eyes, only the really evil people go to hell: Hitler, Genghis Khan, Charles Manson, and Trump supporters. In other words, for the world most everyone will end up in heaven, because they believe that people are basically good. This is one of those teachings that separates an orthodox church body from an heterodox church body. If they cannot get the doctrine of original sin correct; that we are all born and conceived in total sin; that infants and children are corrupt and sinful from their mother’s womb, it is best to avoid such church bodies. But this is the prevailing philosophy of the world and our society: good people go to heaven, bad people go to hell, and even then, one has to be really evil.

Of course, good and bad is according to the standards of the world, not according to the perfect standards of the Law of the Lord God. Mankind loves to praise its own works. They talk about kindness and love, but do not really understand these words. To them kindness and love is letting someone believe and do whatever makes them happy. But any good work that is done outside of faith in the Christ is useless. It is faith that justifies; that makes right with the Lord God. For a person with faith does not look at their works and praise them. The unbelieving world is always praising its works; always patting itself on its back for some great work they did. Howbeit, we are not saved by our works.

A heart filled with faith does not even know that it is doing a good work. It is filled with all humility. In the Book of Revelation, the saints are pictured as throwing their crowns down in front of the Lord. They confess that they are unworthy of the crowns which they have received. Only the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, Who sits on the throne of God the Father is worthy to receive such praise, honor, and glory.

This is pictured in the parable for today from our Lord + Jesus as it is recorded by the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew.

Our Lord tells us that He comes again on the Last Day all peoples, nations and tribes of all times will be gathered before Him. He will sit on His throne of glory, the whole host of heaven, all the angels, will be gathered before Him. He is described as the "Son of Man." This is to indicate that He is our ruler because He is one of us. He bears our flesh. He is a son of man. He is fully man, and fully the Lord God. The angels will separate the sheep, that is, the righteous, from the goats, that is, the unrighteous. This reflects what shepherds have been doing for millennia. For when the sheep and goats are in the pasture during the day, they all graze upon the same grass, but at night, when the day is spent, the shepherd separates the sheep and goats into different pens.

This is a picture of our world now. The sheep and the goats live together in this same world and life. The wheat and the tares grow in the same field. But at the day of harvest, when the day is far spent, the sheep and goats are separated, the wheat and tares are divided.

The sheep are called "blessed." What does it mean to be blessed? The Lord God is blessed when people give Him the due honor, praise, and glory which He rightfully deserves. We are in turn blessed when we gladly receive the gifts are Lord God would have us receive. When we come to this holy house, and hear His Word and receive the Sacraments, we are blessed. Not only because we receive them, but because we receive the gifts inherent in them. These gifts impart to us forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. We are blessed because in faith we believe that these means of grace actually give us these great gifts. This is why the Son of Man, Who sits on the throne of judgment calls the sheep blessed, for through faith they gladly and willingly received His gifts in this life. They did not scorn Him, or reject Him.

Our Lord, the Son of Man, Who is also the Son of God, our Lord + Jesus, deals with the sheep first. He deals with all those who clung to Him in faith first of all, because salvation is meant to the natural order of things. He tells the sheep that because they did all these works, they will inherit eternal life. This Kingdom was prepared for mankind since before the foundation of the world. Even before the Triune Lord God had made the earth and the heaven, before He made the universe, and all that is in it, He planned for our eternal abode in heaven. The unbelieving world is half right. Heaven is the place to which our Lord God intends for us, and all mankind, to be.

And here is where we know that this parable is not about doing enough good works to get into heaven. For our Lord + Jesus, the Son of Man in the parable, tells the sheep about all the good works that they did in this life. And what is their response? "We did not do any of these things you claim we did." The works listed by our Lord are not even that great of works. There is no building of great nations, or lasting buildings. There are no works for which people will praise a person for generations. No, these are all simple, everyday works: giving meat and drink to the hungry and thirsty, taking in strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those innocently imprisoned. These are all works of mercy. These works show the same mercy to our neighbors and brothers that has been shown to us by the Lord God. These are works that are only done through faith in the Lord God. For a heart filled with faith desires to obey the Law of God, to good works toward one's neighbor and show love for the Lord God and his neighbor.

The fact that the sheep do not even consider these works worthy of praise also shows that it is faith that saves and not works. For a person who believes they are saved by works will try to point to the good works. The sheep do not even consider these works worthy of being mentioned. The sheep only see their sins and trespasses, their unworthiness to be called a son of the Lord God. The sheep do not even believe that they should be on the right-hand side. The firmly believe that all the honor, praise, glory, and worth belongs solely to the Lamb of God Who sits upon the throne of His glory. Only

the Lamb of God Who suffered and died for the sins of the whole world is worthy to receive all praise and adoration.

But our Lord + Jesus, the Son of Man and of God, shows His mercy to the sheep. They are truly blessed by the Father, for they will receive eternal life. We will receive eternal life on account of the faith that was gifted to us by the Holy Ghost, Who created such faith in us because we freely and willingly received Holy Baptism, the Holy Absolution, the Lord's Supper, and gladly and willingly heard the words of the Gospel and clung to them in faith. We came together into this place to unite together in fellowship with one another sharing our faith and our forgiveness with one another. By these means the Lord God created faith in us, and strengthened our faith throughout our life through our continual use of these means of grace. Therefore, we will receive the Kingdom prepared for us from before the foundation of the world.

Sadly, my dear friends, not everyone will rejoice to receive these gifts which seem in the world's eyes small and insignificant. The Son of Man on His throne deals with the goats almost as an afterthought. It is not in His nature to condemn. In truth, the goats have condemned themselves. They are cursed because they have cursed themselves. They have rejected the gifts of the Lord God while they lived in this life. They sought glory and fame through their own good works. They lacked the one thing necessary: faith. Notice that when our Lord + Jesus tells them that they did not do all the good works listed, that they are shocked to hear that they did not do them. No good work done without faith will merit anything.

This is how it is with the world. They praise their own self-made works. They love to be patted on the back for doing some work that is praiseworthy in the eyes of the world. Be very wary of anybody who needs to have their good deeds shown to the whole world. All the giving to the poor and needy avails for nothing if it is done without faith in the Lord + Jesus. For it is only by faith that we are credited with the righteous acts of our Lord + Jesus. The goats are proof that good works avail nothing. They are not, as our society likes to say these days, "the greatest of all time." Again, our Lord lists simple everyday works: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick, clothing the naked, comforting the stranger and those in prison. A person can do all of these works every day of their life and it still not matter if they lack faith in the Triune Lord God.

This is why they are cursed. They rejected the gifts of the Lord God. They rejected the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of the Lord God. They should have attended to these things, while still doing the good works they were doing. But because they reject the Lord God and His Son, they are cursed eternally.

It is here where we see a picture of what hell is. The sheep were told by the Son of Man to "Come." This is truly what heaven is, it is where the Lord God is; to be in His presence is truly to be in heaven. We get a foretaste of heaven when we come to this holy place and receive His gifts. This place pales in comparison to the true joys of heaven. For there we will be with our Lord + Jesus, and with all the saints and angels of heaven for all eternity. To not be where the Lord + Jesus is is truly hell. This is what the Son of Man tells the goats. He tells them to "Depart." They are cursed to forever be away from His presence; to forever be away from Him.

People complain about this world constantly. We all have done it. This world is full of pain and misery because it is full of sin. Pain and misery will continue to exist in this world because sin will continue to exist in this world. In heaven we will no longer have to endure the burden of sin and shame that we have in this life, for we will forever be with our Lord. The goats, the cursed by the Father, who have really cursed themselves by their unbelief, will forever be separated from the Lord's grace and protection. As bad as this life is, hell will be thousands of times worse, for the Lord God will remove His protections and guard from all those cursed to such a place. Even worse, is that this place has always

been intended as the place of punishment for the devil and his angels.

Knowledge of these things should produce at least two reactions in us. First, we should continue to show mercy to our neighbors, so that by such mercy shown to them, they may hear and believe on the Lord + Jesus. We should have a concern to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to as many as will receive them, so that they may join us on the right-hand side in the Kingdom of our heavenly Father. For a product of faith is to have the same heart as our Lord, Who desires that no man should be lost. It saddens Him that the goats have rejected Him and have cursed themselves to an eternity away from Him and His mercy.

The second reaction is that we should rejoice. For, my dear friends, the Last Day is not a day that we need fear. It will not be a day of wrath and mourning for those who cling in faith to the Lord + Jesus. It will not be a dreadful day for us, but it will be a day when we will get to enjoy the eternal joys of heaven. We will stand among all the saints. We will all be together. We will be reunited with all of our loved ones who have died in the faith. On that Day we will join the heavenly host. From that Day onto forever, we will sing of all of the wonderful things our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ has done for us. He has saved us from our sins, and brought us into His heavenly Kingdom. Therefore, my dear friends, let us not forsake the gathering together with one another in this place. For it is here that we get a foretaste of the joys that will be given to us. It is here that our faith is strengthened and preserved. Rejoice, my dear friends, for we who bear the righteousness of the Christ, who bear His works, will enter into eternal life with Him forever. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!