

Seeing Jesus
Matthew 25:31-46

“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. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (ESV)

A pastor once invited his congregation to write comments or questions about his sermon, and put them into a kind of suggestion box. It took several weeks before the first slip of paper appeared. It said simply, “We want to see more of Jesus.” The content of that note was direct, honest, and

important. People who have come to know Jesus want to see more and more of him. They want to meet him, one by one, in the Bible, and they want to see Him at work in their lives. We all want to see more of Jesus. And it is very possible, that we will be seeing a whole lot of him, any day now.

When the prophets of the Old Testament shared God’s revelation of what our future looks like, they prophesied about the One who would come with mighty power, to make all things right. The prophets encouraged their listeners and today’s readers to anticipate a glorious Messiah and a triumphant King.

There are two and only two comings of Jesus Christ into our world described in the Bible. When we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating the first coming. At that coming, we rejoice that our redeemer, the Son of God, came in lowliness, in the form of a baby. Being fully human, he could suffer, he could know pain, he could be thirsty and he would also be tempted. He could be conspired against, despised and even killed. We continue to rejoice that He came and lived among us and loved us anyway. He opened his hands and his heart to us. He willingly laid down his life for us. It’s how he came the first time, as a servant, in all lowliness. We love what we see in that first coming.

But we still want to see more of Jesus, and we will. The Scriptures tell us He will come again, and this time, there will be no nine-month notice. It will be sudden – no countdown clock in Times Square. His second coming will be a coming in glory for the purpose of public judgment. He will not be a lowly infant, but a powerful and righteous judge, the King over all creation. He will come with all the angels, and he will sit on his kingly throne in all his glory.

Now as Jesus gives us a view of that day of judgment, Lutheran Christians are a bit startled. The focus of our doctrine, since the time of the Reformation has been on emphasizing grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone. Now we see the last great day, the day Christ promised, and at first glance it seems to be a judgment based on works. Jesus says to those on his right, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you

visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Therefore, come in, receive your reward.”

And to those on his left, he says, in effect, “You had your chance to minister to me and to those in need, and you did not. Therefore, away with you.” So what happened to grace alone and faith alone?

The issue is resolved by looking closely at God’s Word. BEFORE Jesus lists their works, He has already separated the sheep from the goats – the saved from the condemned. On what basis? On the basis of their faith, a gift of God. Only then does Jesus mention their works as physical evidence of faith. For those who are condemned, their total absence of good works is proof that they were without faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please the righteous and royal judge.

The sheep are unaware of their works. They weren’t trusting their actions as the basis for being saved. When Jesus checks off their good actions and calls attention to them, they ask “When was that? When did we see you? The message of Jesus’ teaching comes through loud and clear: Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to your cross I cling.”

The sheep, the saved are not counting on their good works. This is as it should be. When Christ lives in us, we do good works naturally without focusing any attention on ourselves. In Matthew 6, in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his listeners, “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” When both hands are busy in serving God and others, neither hand points out our goodness. The righteous of God do not keep a running total of their lives of service, as if God is indebted to them for all they have done. Rather, we love and serve, not for selfish reasons, but simply because we love Jesus and we want others to see Jesus when they look at us. On the day of judgment, believers are unaware of their good works. Their attention is on their Lord. There is an old saying that angels have wings because they take themselves so lightly. Sheep too, believers in Jesus, look beyond themselves to the Shepherd and His undeserved kindness.

Would you like to see more of Jesus. Then look for him today as he moves about the earth, as one of the countless homeless and poor and naked and hungry.

Because Jesus has loved you so wonderfully, and because you love Jesus, minister to Him by ministering to the least and lowest of the people you can reach.

Would you like to see more of Jesus? Then serve Him today, like the angels. When He comes in judgment and sits in glory on his throne, by His grace you may have the thrill of all your hopes, as you hear him say:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

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