

Scary Last Things?

Matt. 25:31-46 & 2 Peter 3:3-14 & Daniel 7:9-14

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When we hear the reading for these last three Sundays of the church year there are many people who just cringe. Why? Because of all the language that revolves around judgment.

Just as true, there are those who read these “end times” things and do one of two things. Some try to figure out when these things will happen, and others figure we have waited long enough without them happening, so they probably won’t happen. Of course, behind both of these responses is a certain amount of fear about the end times and the impending judgment.

As we talked about last week, there is a certain amount of fear that is evoked in our hearts and minds when we think about death, or about the end of all things. It arises in part because we know that God is indeed a just God, there needs to be some sort of justice brought to bear for the sinfulness that we each know we have brought into the world.

Judgment terrifies us. We heard the words God inspired Peter to record for us: Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!... Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

Many find these to be harsh and terrifying words. What kind of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? Especially as you are waiting for God to destroy the world in fire? You are to be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

We know that before God we are guilty, we are not holy. We are sinful, for we know what we have done in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We have sinned in what we have done, and what we have left undone. No, we have not loved God with our whole heart. And we certainly have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We know that we justly deserve God’s wrath and eternal punishment.

Because of our awareness of God’s righteous and just wrath against sinners, we are rightly concerned about judgment.

But dear friends, your sinfulness is exploited by Satan in this regard, Satan wants us to trust in ourselves, not in Christ.

He would like it if you were the goats who claim before the Son of Man on the last day, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stand or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” He wants us trusting in our own works, because when we trust our own works, there is no way that we have earned salvation, we will be cast into eternal punishment.

Satan also likes to tempt us to despair of our own works. He would like nothing better than have you believe that you are not good enough, that by our works we have lost all chance and opportunity at a place in God's kingdom. He wants us to turn away from Christ in shame. The devil does not want you to trust what Christ has done upon the cross. He wants you to believe you are not worthy of that sacrifice, he wants you to despair of our own deeds.

Dear friends, yes, you are to be holy and blameless. Yes, you are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned. You are to care for those who cannot care for themselves. But you believe that you need to look for those needing your help out there, in the world? Who is sitting next to you and around you in the pew? Is it your family? They are those who you care for, just as Christ describes in the Gospel – and you do not even know you are doing it.

Why do you not know you are doing it? For you are compelled by the love of Christ within you to do so. You do it without thinking, for you do it out of love.

As for that last day, why is it scary? It should not be! You are in Christ! And if you are in Christ, you are holy and blameless...

How, you ask? What did God do in sending His own Son into the world? Why is it that you have the same flesh and blood that He does? It is so that He might take into His own flesh your sin, so that He might bear in His own body, your iniquities. He who was without sin, became sin for you, and bore you sin in His body upon the cross, and there He sacrificed His holiness and godliness to suffer your punishment. It was the spotless, blameless Lamb of God who was sacrificed to pay for your sinfulness.

Christ is your peace, dear friends. Christ is your confidence. Christ is how you can laugh at Satan's attempts to cause you to cower in fear at the approach of the last days.

You do not need to know when they will happen, for they hold no terror for you. They are not scary, for you know that on that day, you will go away into eternal life.

Why can you be confident?

You hunger for righteousness, and Christ feeds you His flesh, pierced to satisfy you and bring you peace.

You thirst for holiness, and Christ gives you His blood to drink.

In baptism, He clothes your nakedness with His own pure white robe of righteousness.

He welcomes you into His kingdom, for although you were a stranger to perfection, He bestows His holiness upon you.

You were crippled in sin-sickness, and He visited you with a Word of forgiveness, granting you healing.

In a prison of your own making, He visited you and broke the chains of your bondage to sin with the forgiveness He purchased for you upon the cross.

Why should that day leave you scared? Indeed! We look forward to its coming, for it means that this life, with all the trials and tribulations will have come to an end.

While I know that the lyrics may vary a little bit from hymnal to hymnal, but our sermon hymn expresses our confidence as we face these last days so very well, especially the last three verses. As I came to love them, they were written this way:

O Jesus, who my debt didst pay, And for my sin wast smitten, Within the Book of Life, oh, may My name be also written! I will not doubt; I trust in Thee, From Satan Thou hast made me free And from all condemnation.

6. Therefore my Intercessor be And for Thy blood and merit Declare my name from judgment free With all who life inherit, That I may see Thee face to face With all Thy saints in that blest place Which Thou for us hast purchased.

It is why we pray, Thy kingdom come. And as verse seven concludes.

7. O Jesus Christ, do not delay, But hasten our salvation; We often tremble on our way In fear and tribulation. Then hear us when we cry to Thee; Come, mighty Judge, and make us free From every evil! Amen. Amen.