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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Last Sunday of the Church Year (Proper 29A)

November 26, 2017

Text: I Corinthians 15:23–24; Matthew 25:31–46

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

When you go on a big trip, it's a good idea to have an itinerary, an orderly arrangements of events. The apostle Paul gives an itinerary of sorts related to the events of the Last Day. The great events of the End Times began, amazingly enough, on Easter! Listen the itinerary of the End Times, "But each in his own order: 1) Christ the firstfruits, 2) then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 3) Then comes the end, when he (i.e., Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power" (I Cor. 15:23–24).

Christ's resurrection was the first great event. The second will be the resurrection of the righteous on the Last Day. After that, Jesus will destroy every power and authority. Finally, our Lord will hand over His kingdom to His Father. The Bible doesn't give every detail about the events of the Last Day but Holy Scripture gives us enough to know the broad contours of the greatest event to come in human history.

Today's Gospel reading describes some of the events associated with the last two items of Paul's Last Day's itinerary: the destruction of every rule and authority and when Jesus will hand His kingdom over to His Father.

It all begins with the Lord Jesus coming again to this earth in glory with all heaven's angels. Everybody in all creation will see King Jesus for who He is: the glorious Son of God the Father manifested in human flesh and blood. Everybody will be resurrected, the just and the unjust. And everybody will see this glorious, majestic, awesome Lord Jesus. "He will sit on his glorious throne" (vs. 31) and everyone human being ever to live will present themselves before Him.

The glorified Lord Jesus isn't conducting an investigative trial on the Last Day. This judgment doesn't determine who is a sheep, a believer, or a goat, an unbeliever. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows who belong to Him; and He hasn't lost a single sheep in all of human history. Jesus promised in John 10:27–28, "My sheep hear my voice, and

I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

When the Lord Jesus sits upon His glorious throne, He will issue His divine sentence of eternal reward or everlasting rejection. To the righteous sheep gathered on His right, He pronounces the following judgment, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for from the foundation of the world” (vs. 34). The Lord’s sheep are the blessed ones.

When we hear, “you who are blessed by my Father...” we should also be hearing the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for the name of Jesus. The blessed ones of Matthew 5 are the same blessed one of Matthew 25. Finally, on the Last Day, the blessed ones receive what Jesus promised in the Beatitudes: the kingdom of heaven prepared before the foundation of the world, the comfort of undying life, the earth, without the sting of sin and death, as an inheritance, the complete satiation of hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy unto life everlasting, the privilege of seeing God without fear or shame, which were the first results of Adam and Eve’s original sin, and the honor to be called sons of God.

Dear saints of God, this is the judgment that will be pronounced over all the righteous, the judgment that will be pronounced over you believers in Christ Jesus. You did not earn such a judgment. The Lord Jesus Christ, our Master and Savior, earned this for us in His perfect life, by His death for our sins on Calvary, and by His resurrection from the dead on the third day. The judgment we will hear on the Last Day is a proclamation of grace, steadfast love, and mercy. This is why the Biblical teaching about the Last Day is not fearful for us. Rather, the Holy Spirit creates within us a longing to see Jesus and the glories of His kingdom. Has not Jesus already taught us in His word to remain faithful and to be ready (Matt. 25:1–30)? He has already overcome the world (Jn. 16:33), the devil and death. Therefore, we take heart and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

To the unrighteous, the goats, gathered on His left, Jesus pronounced this judgment, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (vs. 41). The Judge declares them to be cursed and their punishment is the eternal fire intended not for them, but for the devil and his angels. That is the tragedy of sin and unbelief. Man suffers a judgment intended for Satan and his devils. What’s

even more tragic is that the Lord Jesus died for all their sins. God desires that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the saving truth. But the goats would not. Their judgment unto eternal condemnation is contrary to God's desire for them; the responsibility for their eternal fate is their own, not God's. He pronounces what is true of their desires, the nature, and their characters. They are goats, unbelievers. And they will suffer an unbeliever's fate contrary to God's love and saving will for them. Lord, have mercy upon us all and upon all in this world.

Remember, I said earlier that St. Paul declares the destruction of every rule and authority and power to be one of the events of the Last Day. This occurs when the unrighteous goats are cast into eternal punishment along with Satan and his angels. At that moment, all rebellion, every evil, every form of corruption and wickedness, all the powers of darkness and misery, are forever locked away in hell. That is the Biblical word for it; that's what the Lord Jesus Himself calls it.

Revelation 20:10–15 describes this event with more detail. I would like to read it so we can understand what it means when Paul says the Lord Jesus destroys all rule, authority, and power.

¹⁰and the devil...was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. ¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it....¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

As the Church of the living Lord Jesus, our prayer is that many, many people will hear the saving Gospel, be baptized and taught the life-giving Scriptures, be nourished with Christ's body and blood, and join with Christian saints who pray, praise, and give thanks to God for snatching them out of the clutches of Satan's evil, deceptive reign and bringing them into the pure, holy kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace. May God the Father use us as His instruments for the extension of His kingdom among us.

The last event of the Last Day is when Jesus delivers over the kingdom He established by His death and resurrection to His heavenly Father. At that moment, the consummation of all things is completed. The new heavens and the new earth with the new Jerusalem established in their midst, are forever settled (Rev. 21). The task given by God the Father to His beloved Son in the power of the Holy Spirit is completed. Revelation 21:5 – 7 describes what happens as Jesus hands over the kingdom to His Father:

⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” ... ⁶And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

You, dear sheep and saints of the Lord, are inheritors of the great event in the universe. The itinerary is laid out before us. The Lord Jesus has prepared the way. Let us not be afraid nor be discouraged. The Lord Jesus knows us each by name. He will bring us to our eternal inheritance prepared before the foundation of the world. It is settled and established. Christ has promised, He will fulfill it.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.