

Judge Jesus shows us the evidence.

Text: Matthew 25:31-46 for November 12, 2017 by Pastor Bolwerk

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 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, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers 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, 'I tell you the truth, 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."

Imagine walking into a courtroom to watch a trial taking place before a judge. As you are watching the trial, the person bringing the accusations has all kinds of evidence against the defendant. The evidence makes it clear that the other person is guilty. When the judge asks the defendant for their side, all the person says is, "Judge, I am guilty and I throw myself on the mercy of the court." Now imagine if that judge said, "I find you not guilty. You are free to go." We would certainly have to say that this was not a just judge. That judge was unjust because he had no evidence to back up his verdict.

As Jesus shows us this picture of Judgment Day, he wants to make it clear to all people that his verdict is absolutely true and correct. Jesus does this by backing up his verdict with concrete proof.

Theme: Judge Jesus shows us the evidence.

1. Evidence that shows us he is just.
2. Evidence that shows us how to live.

Right before our text Jesus had been telling parables about being ready for his second coming. Christ wants us to be ready because when he returns on that last day he will be judging all people.

So Jesus uses a parable to paint a picture of Judgment Day. On that day Jesus will return first as a King, showing all people his true power and glory. Jesus will also return as a Judge. He will sit on his heavenly throne and pronounce judgment upon everyone. "**All the nations will be gathered before him** [...]" (Matthew 25:32). No one is going to be left out of his judgment.

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Christ's court is no ordinary court. The order in which things are done seems backwards. In this court the sentence comes first. To the believers Jesus' sentence is a blessing, **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world"** (v. 34). To the unbelievers Jesus' sentence is a curse, **"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"** (v. 41).

Since Jesus is God he knows what is in every person's heart, so he knows exactly how to judge them. Yet people cannot see what is in another person's heart, so they may object and say, "Where is the evidence to support your verdict?" This is why, after handing down his verdict, Jesus shows the evidence. He gives evidence everyone can plainly see: The evidence of people's actions. For believers Jesus focuses on what they did: **"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, [...] you gave me something to drink, [...] you invited me in, [...] clothed me, [...] looked after me, [...] came to visit me"** (vs. 35-36). With the unbelievers Jesus focuses on what they did not do: **"[...] you gave me nothing to eat, [...] nothing to drink, [...] you did not invite me in, [...] you did not clothe me, [...] you did not look after me"** (vs 42-43).

Hearing what Jesus says a person might get the idea that there is something they have to do to be saved. Nothing could be further from the truth. God's word clearly tells us, **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast"** (Ephesian 2:8-9). Deeds do not save people. When Jesus returns he will not be looking for people working hard to get into heaven. In Luke's gospel we learn what Jesus is looking for when he asks, **"[...] when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth"** (Luke 18:8)? When Jesus returns on Judgment Day he will be looking for faith; faith that trusts in him as Savior. A person is saved by grace, through faith in Christ. Deeds are simply evidence of whether or not a person has faith.

We see this in the response of the two groups being judged. Notice how the believers don't remember doing those things for Jesus. That is because their faith moved them to act out of gratitude to Jesus. They wanted to thank Jesus for saving them from sin and hell. So they lovingly served their neighbors as a way of thanking God, without realizing they were also serving God himself. Their works gave evidence of their faith.

The unbelievers respond in exactly the opposite way. When Jesus says they did not help him the unbelievers immediately point to their own works. They say, "Jesus when did we ever see you in one of these situations, and *not* help you." They trusted in themselves to "work off" their sins. They were not trusting in Jesus. They thought they could make themselves right with God. They thought they could do something to save themselves. Their actions showed their lack of faith. It was this lack of faith that ultimately condemned them.

The evidence Jesus presents makes it clear that his judgment is just. So why did Jesus tell us about what's going to happen on Judgment Day? Is he telling us anything Scripture has not already told us? We certainly know that in the end believers will go to heaven and the unbelievers will go to hell. So why does Jesus give us this information?

Our Lord is trying to shake us out of our spiritual slumber. Our Lord is talking about the day he will come back to judge. That day could be any day. It could be today. Now, I don't know about you but when I read these words of Jesus I get just a little uncomfortable. I know I don't always do things that show evidence of my faith. As a parent I could certainly say that I have

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helped to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, yet I have to ask myself, “When was the last time I showed Christian love to a stranger? When is the last time I actually cared enough to invite a stranger into my life so I could have an opportunity to share my Savior with them?” Too often I get wrapped up in the things of this world: working, studying, meetings, sports, hobbies. I get so focused on what I am doing that I take my eyes off of Jesus. When I do my heart starts to grow cold toward my Savior. I do not put him first in my life. I do not trust him as I should. When I take my eyes off Jesus I miss opportunities to give evidence of my faith; opportunities Jesus puts right in front of me.

What can I say except, “Lord Jesus forgive me for this lack of faith! For this lack of evidence of my faith.” I know what my sins deserve. Like Adam and Eve I find myself fearing God’s judgment and trying to hide my sin because I know that God is just.

Then Jesus comes along and speaks this parable to us. In these words Jesus gives us his Gospel. Look closely at Christ’s words. What is the one thing that is never mentioned on Judgment day, either to believers or unbelievers. The word ‘sin’ never once crosses our Savior’s lips. No one, not believer or unbeliever, will be judged based on their sins. On that day Jesus will stand before you and present the evidence that he completely paid for sin. All he will have to do, is show you his hands. Everyone will be able to see the nail marks in Jesus hands and his feet; the evidence that no sin was left unpaid. Even those times when we do not fully trust in Jesus, when we do not give evidence to our faith – Jesus paid for those sins too. Believe it. Trust the evidence that Jesus won forgiveness for you. Judge Jesus shows us the evidence. Evidence that shows us that he is just.

Now if all Jesus was trying to do was show us that he is just he would not have had to use this long parable. There are plenty of places in the Bible where we see that Jesus is just. So what are we to do with this evidence? Our Lord sets his evidence before us as an example of how we can show our love and thanks to him. Judge Jesus shows us the evidence. Evidence that shows us how to live.

Jesus has saved you from spending forever in **“the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”** (v. 41). By looking at this evidence we can see some ways in which we can thank him. Realize that Jesus is not saying that we have to do all or any of these things to show evidence of our faith. He is simply giving us examples of how to show, by our actions, the faith that is in our heart.

Some are things you may have done before. If you donated money, food, clothing, or time to help the victims of hurricanes Harvey or Irma, then you have helped to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and clothe the naked. Perhaps you have a new neighbor who has moved in next door. Invite them over. Help them feel welcome to the neighborhood. And you do not have to go to the hospital to visit the sick. Do you know someone who is sick, or physically disabled? Give them a call, send them an e-mail, or stop in for a visit. Sometimes our presence can mean more to someone than all the medicine in the world.

Perhaps you are a person with a physical disability. You may be thinking to yourself, “I don’t have a lot of money to give, and I am not able to get out to visit other people”. Yet there are still things that you can do to thank your Savior. Our larger church body, the Wisconsin Synod, has a prisoner pen-pal program. They connect people with prisoners so that they can write letters to each other. What a great way to share your Savior with someone who really needs to hear about him.

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Finally, there is something we are all able to do, and that is pray. No matter what our situation or circumstance in life we can all pray for the people God places into our lives. Pray for God to help them; to bless them; to give faith where it is needed, and to strengthen the faith of those who believe.

For all of the possibilities we have to serve our Savior, there is a sense of urgency that goes along with all of them. That urgency comes from seeing those people who are standing on Jesus' left on Judgment Day. You may be thinking, "Well there are supposed to be people on his left. Those are the unbelievers." Yet that's the problem. Jesus does not want anyone on his left! God tells us through the Apostle Paul that he wants "**all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth**" (1 Timothy 2:4).

Unfortunately we know there will be those on Jesus left. Those who have already died in unbelief. But that's not what God wants. It is an urgent call to spread the saving message of the gospel to as many people as possible, so that the number who stand on Jesus left may not continue to grow.

What better way could we have of thanking our Savior then by sharing him with the people who do not know him. What better way to show our love back to God for all he has done for us then to share his love and forgiveness with the people he puts in our lives.

See the evidence. Evidence that show us how to live. Live the evidence. With the gifts and abilities that God has given you let the evidence of your faith shine through in all that you do.

With this picture of Judgment Day Jesus gives us more than just evidence that he is just. Jesus gives comfort to his believers. Comfort to know that on that final day Jesus is not going to stand before us as an angry judge. Instead he will stand before us as our Savior, our brother, our friend. He will be there waiting with open arms to welcome us into our inheritance: the kingdom of heaven which he won for us. Thank you Jesus for not only being our just judge, but especially for being our Savior. Amen.