

"PREPARED?!"

LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR/SUNDAY OF THE

FULFILLMENT

Matthew 25:31-46

November 22, 2020

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² 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. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ 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.'

⁴¹ "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. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ 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.' ⁴⁴ 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?' ⁴⁵ 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.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Have you ever been someplace where people had prepared for your arrival? Perhaps you went on a business trip or to a conference. At the registration table was a packet of information for you, with a nametag. The conference was prepared for your arrival.

You've heard stories of how hotels and resorts plan for the arrival of a celebrity, a politician, or someone famous. The resorts stock the celebrity's favorite luxuries or his favorite wine, beer, and spirits. If the celebrity likes a certain type of fabric for his bedding or a certain type of exotic food, these hotels and resorts make sure they have it on hand. The celebrity knows the resort has prepared for his visit.

In the Gospel for today, we hear of Jesus' coming to judge the living and the dead. Usually texts that focus on the end of the world tell us to prepare for Jesus' coming. We often hear how Jesus will return like a thief in the night, how he'll return like a king from a long journey, how he'll return in

some other unexpected way. We're given signs that his return is soon, and we should prepare.

Today, we hear that *Jesus* has made plans *for us* when he returns. To those on his right hand, those who are faithful and are counted righteous, Jesus says, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (v 34). What an amazing thought! Before Jesus made the heavens and the earth, he already had you in mind. Before the waters were separated to form the dry land, the sea, and the sky, Jesus had you in mind. More than that, Jesus prepared his kingdom for you.

JESUS PREPARED A KINGDOM FOR YOU BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD to provide you with comfort.

- I. Most people find a discussion about the end of the world to be frightening.
 - Fears about global warming (aka now as climate change), destruction by asteroid, nuclear war, and now we have a global pandemic that has turned the world upside down.
 - As frightening as the end of the world may be, judgment is even more fearful (vv 31–33).
 - The Ten Commandments show us that we deserve to be judged and receive condemnation.
 - ✓ Apart from Christ, no work we do is considered good or pleasing to God.
 - ✓ The "Not" examples: "I was . . . in prison and you did not visit me" (vv 43, 44).
- II. But punishment was *not* prepared for people from the foundation of the world (v 41).
 - Jesus did not decide to save some and damn others.
 - The place of eternal punishment was prepared for the devil and his evil angels for rebelling against God. Hell was **not** made for people.
 - Jesus "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4).
- III. Therefore, as Christians (sheep) we can eagerly anticipate Jesus' (our Good Shepherd AND King) return because of what he *has* prepared.
 - Jesus' lengthy discourse on his return comes just days before his death.
 - ✓ Everything to follow had been planned, prepared, by God from the foundation of the world.
 - ✓ By what Jesus would do on Friday, he would prepare us

- for his kingdom.
- ✓ Christ has taken the punishment we deserve upon himself in his death on the cross.
 - Now you have received his righteousness. Every act of love he has done is counted as yours (vv 35–40).
 - So, his kingdom, prepared from the foundation of the world, is also yours (vv 34).

Our Lord Jesus tells us that he prepared a kingdom for us to comfort us. We need not fear his return. Because he has forgiven all your sins, you will be found at his right hand. You will receive the kingdom that he has prepared for you. And he loved you so much that he planned your salvation and your reward before the foundation of the world! You are a guest your Lord has been waiting to receive for a long time, in fact, before time began!

Prepared? Prepared for THE END? On our own: NO! For apart from Jesus (John 15 imagery of the Vine and the branches) we can do nothing. But in Christ? Prepared? Prepared for THE END? YES! PREPARED! Our Judgment Day HAS ALREADY TAKEN PLACE! There on a hill on a very dark Friday that we call Good, Jesus cried out "IT IS FINISHED!" All the preparations had been fulfilled in the shedding of his blood to make peace between us and God. Therefore, we face the future with the confidence that Christ our King, Jesus our Good Shepherd has done all things well. As we wait for his return, let us not lose this invitation that has been prepared for us to attend the eternal wedding feast of Thanksgiving and Praise to God for his gift of salvation through the blood of the Lamb, Jesus. Let us take our personally prepared invitation (signed and sealed by Jesus himself!) and share that same invitation with the spiritually dead and needy among us (those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, sick from their sin and imprisoned by the Devil and those same sins) as well as those who are physically hungry, thirsty, in need of clothing and shelter as well as in jail or prison. In so doing, may we be part of extending the reign of King Jesus into the lives of more people and parcels of land on this planet! We need not worry about WHEN the Last Day will come ... because we know WHO will be there: Jesus! Let continue to follow his lead and leadership by listening to his voice, "Come and follow Me, and I will make you fishers of all peoples and nations." Let us work while it is still day!

To God be the glory!

Amen.