

Untitled (39)

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Preacher: Julian Dobbs

[0:00] Will you pray with me? Our gracious loving Father, we thank you for the privilege of gathering together to worship you in the name of your Son.

! We pray now that as we open your word, your Holy Spirit would come and quicken our minds and our hearts, that we may hear your word and respond to it.

And glad and sincerely praise you as we gather together in Jesus' name. Amen. It's fascinating, isn't it? As we move towards the close of the calendar year, and as we move towards the end of our liturgical year, Advent begins the new church's year.

We're almost there. I find it fascinating that when we get to this point in the church's calendar, we find ourselves discussing the day of judgment.

It's fascinating. Through our heads run thoughts like eschatology and last things and millenniums and raptures and tribulations and Armageddon and Antichrist and judgment.

[1:11] And sometimes, if we're honest, it seems just a little unclear and maybe even unimaginable. However, in Acts chapter 17, we read these words, God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

So, we believe in a day of judgment because it's there in the word of God. You know, when the small child says, But that's not fair, Daddy!

They believe in judgment. When the student sends back their papers to be regraded, don't they too believe in judgment? When the NFL crowd cries out to the referee to change a decision?

They also believe in judgment. Therefore, it shouldn't surprise us, given all that we believe about in judgment in this world, to find that God warns us of the judgment in the next world.

And that's precisely where we find ourselves as we come to this text set aside for this morning.

Now, when you heard the gospel read by our deacon, you might have thought, Great!

[2:32] The bishop's going to preach about serving the poor. Well, let's have a look and see what Jesus says, shall we? Three very simple points. They're not all original to me, but I hope they'll be impactful to you as they are to me.

Firstly, the fact of our Lord's coming judgment. Secondly, the outcomes of His judgment. And thirdly, the basis of His judgment.

And I do believe that it will be helpful to you if you open the Bibles on page 988, or your own Bible, Matthew chapter 25. You've heard me say, many of you before, that Bibles are a whole lot better open than they are closed.

So let's open them this morning. Jesus uses, yes, the image of a shepherd separating sheep from goats as a factual description of judgment when He returns.

And notice that it's Jesus Himself who comes as the judge. Notice that. That's important. His judgment will be universal. It will involve everyone.

[3:35] It will be unavoidable, secondly. It will be irreversible. The judgment will be binary. I'll talk a little bit about that in a moment. And the judgment will be personal.

Let's have a look, firstly, in verse 31 of Matthew chapter 25. Do you see it there? When the Son of Man, notice that phrase, comes in glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

That title, the Son of Man, is an Old Testament title for the one to whom God gives all power and all authority.

And unashamedly, notice, Jesus takes that title for Himself. Not just here in Matthew 25, but elsewhere in the Gospels. Jesus, the Son of Man, Jesus, with all power, all authority, comes in glory, and He is the judge.

Now that poses the first challenge for some of us Christians. Because if our view of Jesus is only, you know, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Scandinavian Jesus that we find in many stained-glass windows, or the man nailed to the cross, then we have a little bit of a problem, don't we, with this Son of Man coming to judge.

[5:00] Jesus says, at judgment, notice, what will happen? You will meet Me. And I will be seated on the throne. And I will be accompanied by all the heavenly angels.

It blows our minds. It's too much for us to comprehend. And you'll be summoned by Me, says Jesus. And I will decide your eternal destiny. Look back in our text again.

When the Son of Man comes in glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Now, I know this whole talk of judgment can be difficult for us to grasp, so I've got written down the side of my sermon notes here to smile.

So I'm smiling for you today, but it doesn't change the seriousness of this word. Because this is a word that comes to us from Jesus.

And most of what we know about judgment in the Bible, in fact, most of what we know about hell in the Bible, God the Father entrusts to Jesus to teach us.

[6:03] When the Son of Man comes in glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. And who is to judge? There He is. Jesus is the judge. And look with me, verse 32.

Who's going to be judged? Just the bad people? Just whom? All the nations. Now, who might that include?

The United States of America? You say on your sign, as I drove in this morning, pray for this nation. We better be praying for this nation, because we are going to be judged.

All the nations. No one, no one will be without judgment here. Our Lord's judgment is universal.

Verse 41. And even the devil and his angels are included.

Now, that should be good news for us. Right? But so too are all the nations. I like to say there are two appointments that every man, woman, and child has.

[6:59] And neither of them can be put in your schedule or in your diary because the date is not known. The first appointment is the day we die. And while it might be, you know, good to know exactly the time and hour and place and events surrounding that time and the actual date, we cannot.

And perhaps it's God's providence that we cannot. The second appointment that we have is the day of judgment. Those two are for certain. There is an appointment that you and I will not miss.

Judgment is universal. It is unavoidable. It matters not your path in life, how prosperous or popular or prestigious you might be. The citizenship in your passport is immaterial, so too is your sex and creed and color and race and religion.

Our political views are of no consequence. Thank God on that day. It does not matter whether you believe in the day of judgment or not.

People who say to me, Julian, God would never send a person to hell or a loving God would never adjudicate a day of judgment need to understand that their personal view about God will be of no consequence regarding judgment on that day.

[8:14] judgment will happen whether you believe in it or not. You'll be summoned by Jesus whether you like it or not, whether you believe it or not, whether you're ready or not.

Judgment is unavoidable. And do you notice in our text, we still have it open. I can see Pat had it open. And that's right. Praise God for a young man who would open the Bible while it's being read during the gospel reading.

I was so encouraged to watch you read the Bible this morning as it was being read. He had his Bible open. Look, verse 33 and 34, judgment is irreversible.

The sheep will be placed on the right and the goats will be placed on the left. There's no plea bargaining here. There's no court of appeal. There's no opportunity for a retrial or a miscarriage of justice.

This is God acting as judge. His judgment is perfect and it is irreversible. And I said earlier, it is also binary. What does that mean?

[9:20] It's binary. What do I mean by using that word? I mean, there is no middle ground. There's either the left or the right.

That's it. There's no purgatory, no limbo, no excuse, no escape. There's no other option. The agnostic who through intellectual cowardice has put off to decision making.

The procrastinator who thought that he would make a commitment about God one day will find that he or she has made their decision by putting it off. The over-busy 21st century New Yorker who's never made time for the single most important issue in life will find that he or she has made a decision by relegating it to the second division.

Jesus takes our decisions in this life seriously. He takes us at our word and so judgment is universal. I'm trying to smile in case you're getting nervous here. Our judgment is universal. It's unavoidable. It's irreversible. It's binary. And notice judgment will be personal. Look with me. You will be summonsed.

[10:33] And I will be summonsed. 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. They'll be collected.

They'll be convened. They'll be taken in. That's the sense of the word that Jesus uses here. So here's the truth that needs to be said into our understanding. The world might laugh at us.

They do. Political commentators, party organizers, career-minded friends and colleagues may scorn us. Where is the promise of his coming? It's been 2,000 years.

Yes. It has. But with the law today is like 1,000 years. Acts 17. God is fixed today.

On which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. Jesus is that man. His judgment is universal, unavoidable, irreversible, binary, and personal.

[11:34] Take it seriously. Very seriously. Let's look at the outcomes of this judgment. Verses 34. Have a look there. Verse 41 and verse 46.

Deacon John read them to us earlier. Verse 34. 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. Then he will say to those on his left, verse 41. Have a look. Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And then verse 46.

Rather chilling. These will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous into eternal life. So two headings here. The first heading is heaven.

It's one we can smile about. The second heading is hell. It's one we should take very seriously.

Look at verse 34. Heaven. The king will say to those on his right, Come.

[12:36] You who are blessed by my father inherit. It's a lovely word. Inherit the kingdom that's been prepared for you from the foundation of the world. So here is the new creation.

The kingdom. And do you notice that it is very personal. And so too is the presence of God. God is there. It's been prepared and it's been prepared for you. And this permeates the whole concept of eternity.

It's personal about you. It's personal about God. He's preparing it. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world. This is full of God's personal plan and his purpose.

And we see it actually right from the very pages of the book of Genesis. And if we had time, we don't. But if we did, they'll take you back to Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 through 3 and show you the evidence of God having prepared a new creation from the foundations of the world.

You can look at that sometime. Now, as most of you know, if you don't know me, you can tell by my strong North American accent that I didn't grow up in these parts.

[13:45] Brenda and I have the rather odd privilege of being citizens of two countries. When we go down to New Zealand from time to time, if they're friendly, they say to us, welcome home.

And when we come back to the United States and we pull out our U.S. passport, they say to us, welcome home. And you know, when you travel, many of you have traveled, when you travel and you've been away and you come back home, it's generally a beautiful experience, isn't it?

You come to the familiar pathways, you drive through the burbs, see the familiar sights, and then you go up into your room, and if you've got a mother like mine, everything's ready for you.

It's beautiful, isn't it? Jesus says, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.

What a welcome. It puts a smile in our hearts. It's personal and it's beautiful. In fact, the Apostle Paul writes of that time to the Corinthians, no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

[15:01] Heaven. That's the first outcome. Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. It's beautiful. Here comes the second outcome.

Look with me, verse 41. Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Verse 46. And these will go away into eternal punishment. And here we come to hell. Heaven and hell were prominent themes in the writings of respected Anglican author C.S. Lewis.

Writing about hell, Lewis said, I discovered this this week. He said, there is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than the doctrine of hell. If it lay in my power, he said, I'll do it.

But it has the full support of scripture and especially of our Lord's own words. Chilling. Brothers and sisters, however much we might want to avoid it, teaching about hell forms the foundation of so much of what Jesus taught in the Gospels.

[16:15] And it's striking to me that God the Father entrusted teaching about hell so important. He entrusted it to his son. Go to the Sermon on the Mount and you'll find it there again and again and again.

Jesus teaches it. He weeps about it. He warns of it. He dies on the cross to keep us from hell. So four short insights about hell and I've spoken more at length about hell in an online study I've done on End Times which you can find on our diocesan website.

Here's the first thing. Hell is a place of destruction. Would you say destruction? Destruction. The language used of hell in the Gospel is that of fire.

Look with me. You'll see it there. It's verse 41. Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire. Not much pleasure there, is there?

Fire. The fire of hell is literally Gehenna in Matthew's Gospel or the Valley of Hinnom. It's a real place outside the city of Jerusalem.

[17:19] You can go there today. It's outside the Dung Gate where the Jewish people would take their trash. That's why it's called the Dung Gate and they would throw it over the side of the cliff down into a deep valley where the fire wouldn't go out.

And it would smolder and burn and the stench would be ghastly and horrid. It's a real place. In fact, one day Brenda and I took a wrong turn driving around the old city of Jerusalem and we went down and down and down and down and we ended up in hell.

Fascinating though, I said to her, we've got to make a U-turn. And it wasn't pleasant. People were jeering at us and calling us names. It's a dark, deep valley not to be visited.

But as we made a U-turn, where did we go? We ended going back up the same valley towards Mount Zion, the place of the cross. So I like to say, I went to hell and got out.

Hell is a place of destruction. Secondly, it's a place of isolation. Look verse 12 of our passage a little bit earlier in the parable of the ten bridesmaids or the virgins.

[18:26] Do you remember? You'll recall what the master says. He says to them, I never knew you. They're knocking on the door. He says, I never knew you. It's a place of isolation. And to those people who rather crudely say, well, at least all of my buddies will be there in hell with me.

There's no friends. There's no beauty. There's no love, no kindness, no generosity. Again, from C.S. Lewis, he said, hell is made up of people who live at an infinite distance from each other.

It's a place of isolation from God and from his goodness. Notice verse 30. Thirdly, it's a place of punishment.

Look with me. This is why we take it seriously. Look at the words of Jesus. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Verse 41.

Eternal fire. Verse 46. Eternal punishment. Therefore, surely, Jesus teaches that there will be eternal tears. And eternal sadness and eternal pain and eternal anger and fury and outrage.

[19:33] You know, sometimes you hear people say, oh well, God simply confirms us and our desires and sending people to hell. We get what we want. As if people in hell will just be shrugging their shoulders and saying, oh well, never mind.

We'll just have to get used to it. Remember the bridesmaids, the virgins, trying to get into heaven.

The rich man in torment and howlers and torment and begs for release. And when the master has shut the door, those who have failed to enter knock on the door and they say, Lord, open to us.

But the door does not open at that time. It's open now. Hell is a place of destruction and isolation and retribution. Look, it's also eternal.

Now there is disagreement here about this, but I believe it's clear. Just as heaven is eternal, hell is eternal. And the idea that some call annihilationism or conditional immortality finds no foundation in

this gospel text this morning.

[20 : 39] In every context where hell is spoken of as destruction, the natural meaning of the words directs us to an eternal reality. Glance briefly with me at verse 46 and notice what another Anglican author, Dr. J.I. Packer, calls conscious parallelism.

Parallelism. What does that mean? It means this. The word eternal describes both places. The age to come. It's an eternal age. The ages of the ages or as we say in our liturgy, world without end because God is eternal and you cannot avoid the conscious parallelism that there is eternal punishment and eternal life.

So here then is the biblical doctrine of hell presented by Jesus in Matthew 25. It's in fact right throughout Matthew's gospel and I know it's particularly difficult for all of us when we consider loved ones who have died without faith in Christ and we must be very careful to discipline ourselves not to do God's job for him.

He is the judge not you and not me. He shall judge the earth by doing what is right. Not you and not me. Abraham was told right back in the beginning in Genesis 25 the judge will do what is right.

As the creed says, we're about to say it, he will come again to judge the living and the dead. Our response should be on our knees to pray for those we know and those we do not know that they'll be brought to a living faith in Christ before they die.

[22 : 22] Pray for them every day. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. Christ will come as judge. His judgment will be universal. It will be unavoidable.

It will be irreversible. It will be binary. It will be personal. And there are two destinations. Heaven and hell. And hell will be a place of destruction and isolation and punishment and it is eternal. Now you might be thinking and I would forgive you if you were. I didn't realize that our bishop would preach fire and brimstone in November 2020. Could it be that we've utterly failed to receive a seriousness of which God takes our rejection of him?

We know the facts. We've been told the outcomes. So just before I conclude, on what basis does he judge? On what basis?

Go to a funeral? And what do we say about the person who's in the casket? They were such good people. They'll be in heaven. Or I would say in good Kiwi English, he was such a nice chap.

[23 : 45] Is that the basis on which Christ judges? We better have a quick look because this is important, isn't it? And the deacon read it to us. Truly I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Notice that phrase. One of the least of these my brothers, my brothers and sisters. A brother or a sister in the New Testament always, always refers to one of Jesus' own followers, never to humanity as a whole, never to all the poor of the world, never to all the people of the world.

It refers to the followers of Christ. Now listen, this is surprise number one. And I've got three, I like surprises. I've got three quick surprises.

Brenda say, no you don't. I do if I know about them. You know, if I know about the surprises, I really like them. So I'm going to tell you about the surprises so you can like them this morning.

Here's the first one, it's a real surprise. This story, the sheep and the goats, down through the years has been used, hasn't it, to urge us believers to do good deeds of social action and justice, to do so amongst the poorest people of the world, to support any mission that feeds the hungry, invite the old age lonely neighbour to Christmas lunch.

[25 : 20] And we believe that Jesus says if you do that, you'll be safe. On the last day. But these words of Jesus have absolutely nothing to do with these things.

Let me tell you. They have everything to do with standing in solidarity and support of Jesus' own disciples, acknowledging Jesus' own disciples, feeding Jesus' own disciples, going and visiting Jesus' own disciples who are in prison, giving a cup of cold water to a Christian disciple.

Verse 40, look with me, to the least of these my brothers. Whenever you did one of these things, to the least of these my brothers, such as you actually stood with the disciple and served them, you were one with them.

And that is why we have a priority to support the mission and ministry of the church with our time, our treasure, our talent, and our service. And we heard it in the testimony from the Mumphids this morning.

Our priority must always be the disciples of Jesus. But I can hear you saying, but Bishop, we're supposed to go out and serve the poor. Paul writes to the Galatians, whenever you have an

opportunity, work for the good of everyone.

[26:46] That's everyone. Whatever sex, gender, craze, religion, whatever, colour. But especially, he says, for whom? Do you know Galatians 6.10?

Especially for the household of faith. We have a priority to stand in Christian service with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christ. Want to know where to invest support and service? Invest it with Jesus' own disciples. That's the first surprise.

Here's the second surprise. I'll tell you what it is and it'll be a greater surprise for you. Here it is.

What these people do in Matthew 25, they do actually very naturally.

Do you see that? Brenda shared this this morning with me when we were reading the Bible earlier.

They do it in a sense with no knowledge. Look in verse 37. The righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you a drink?

[27:44] 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? Fascinating, isn't it? It's not that they had to say, okay, I want to make sure I'm on the right side of God on judgment day.

I'll work to ensure that I get in by serving all his people and giving my money to the church because Bishop Dobbs said we're to invest in Jesus' own disciples.

No. They were already lined up with Jesus' own disciples. It was a natural thing for them. And they supported gospel people. They knew what needs there were.

They gave a cup of cold water to a gospel person. They were very naturally desiring to visit and stand with the persecuted, the sick, the Christians in prison. And they did it because it was in their DNA.

Because Jesus is in their DNA. They didn't do these things for reward. They did them naturally.

Now don't go out of church today and say Bishop Dobbs said I don't have to serve the poor.

[28:52] Work for the good of all. But especially for those who are of the household of faith. That's the second surprise. Here's the third one. Three surprises today. Here's the third one.

Perhaps it's the greatest surprise of all. And it's there in verse 40. Five little words. You might want to underline them. You did it to me.

Notice that? You see, as you stand up for a family member, a follower of Christ, as one adopted into the family with the maligned and the persecuted and the hated and the despised people of God, as you love them, as you serve them, as you welcome them, as you join them, as you associate with the disciples of Jesus, however strange a thing it may seem in the world, when you do that, you love and serve and welcome Jesus.

It's incredible, isn't it? And this passage has nothing to do with social justice or reforming structures of society before Christ returns. On the day of judgment, when the Lord returns, not on the basis of my works, but on the basis of the fact that I've been rescued to be one of his people, naturally showing the fruit of a repentance lifestyle, Jesus will say, come, come, come, sit on my right.

See, this is the encouragement as we anticipate the end, to embrace the gospel of Jesus. He died for us on the cross, he rose from the dead, he can wash us clean from everything about us, it is deserving of hell, he will welcome us, he will give us rest, and he says, come, come to me, and as we embrace him this morning, as we embrace him, as part of our DNA, we will quite naturally embrace his people.

[30:47] It's just a mark, isn't it, of being one of the sheep of God, as we embrace the people of God. God, as we will be safe with Christ.

Let us pray. We praise you, our Father in heaven, for this glorious truth, taught to us here by Jesus, that you have prepared a dwelling place for your people from before the foundation of the world.

We thank you for this personal nature. We thank you for the wonder of it, the freedom of it, that by grace alone, we are saved. We pray that you would graciously enable us to embrace this wonderful gospel, to look forward to it, to stand with your people, and to wait for your return.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.