

✝ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

I. TWO WEEKS AGO WE HEARD that the Sadducees set a trap for Jesus, thinking that they had proved that there is no resurrection.

Jesus' response to the Sadducees lack of faith is striking: "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." Jesus reminds the Sadducees — and us! — who God is — his depth of power, presence, and knowledge. Nothing can escape being known by him. There is nothing that will ever have been that is not known by him.

Whether we are alive or dead, we are known by God. The dead are all *living* to God. Death does not have the power to erase souls from God's knowledge. He knows all who have gone before us — and not just the memories of them, like the memories we keep of those whom we have loved. God knows all who have been, who are, and who will be, as living, for they are alive to him. Death separates those whom we have loved *from us*; death has no power to separate anyone from God.

The only thing that can separate anyone from God is God Himself — and this he will do on the Last Day, that Day of Judgment that is to come, where the Lord Jesus will sift and separate all of us — bringing some into eternal bliss with him; condemning some into eternal judgment away from him.

II. LAST WEEK WE HEARD Jesus tell the disciples about the *end* of all things.

Now the beginning of the end of this age is, of course, the death of Jesus on the cross. What world can hope to endure after putting to death the Son of God? And so, this world stands condemned because it has killed the very one through whom the world was made. The end of this world is coming; this age is coming to an end. But, just as Jesus told his disciples, "these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." There are things that must take place before the end. One of those things that must take place is the coming of the antichrist.

Perhaps the best analogy of what is coming can be described in terms of a solar eclipse. What is a solar eclipse? It is when the sun is eclipsed by the moon — (when the moon blocks the light of the sun from the earth) — where the sun's light is blocked and so all that can be seen is darkness. This is who the antichrist is — a dark and evil man, who seeks to block the radiance and brilliance of Christ, taking it for himself. As the end of this age draws to an end, the full darkness that will be is embodied in the antichrist, who wants the brilliance and radiance of Christ for himself.

But just as a solar eclipse is but for a moment, so, too, will the time of the antichrist be — temporary, finite, limited, short. And — though evil will be at its worst, yet still the light of Christ will pierce through even this blackest blanket of darkness.

The end will come, but it is still not yet. And so, there remain for us three things: (1) to endure to the very end, whatever end may be allotted for us; (2) to make new Christians through sharing the message of the resurrection and repentance for the forgiveness of sins and praying that the Holy Spirit bring faith in the hearts of those to whom we tell; and (3) to grow in the faith, knowledge, and love of our Lord Jesus, that we may draw near to him and that we may be not deceived by evil.

III. THIS MORNING WE HEARD the judgment of this world. What looked like the judgment of Jesus — his crucifixion — is, in fact, the judgment of the world. What world could hope to endure after putting to death the innocent Son of God, the Christ, the King of Glory?

The world was caught, in the middle of the day, putting to death Jesus. There was Jesus in the middle, upon the cross, and a criminal to his right and to his left, also being crucified. The scene unfolds dark and demonically.

I'm reminded that in Luke's Gospel, immediately after being baptized, Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. How does Satan go about tempting Jesus? He calls into question who Jesus is. Three times Satan begins with *if*: "If you are the Son of God"; "if you will worship me"; "if you are the Son of God."

Is there not a shrill echo of this tempting here? Here we see Satan's influence on the rulers, the soldiers, and the criminal. Three times they call into question who Jesus is. Each takes a demonic turn, mocking the very Son of God: "if he is the Christ"; "if you are the King of the Jews"; "are you not the Christ?"

At the Temptation, and here again at the Crucifixion, three times the identity of Jesus is called into question. At the Temptation, Jesus parries Satan's doubts with Scripture. But here at the Crucifixion, Jesus remains *silent* on his identity. His death on the cross speaks clearly and eternally on exactly who he is. Here we see exactly why Jesus is the one we want to come to judge the living and the dead.

For Christ has died. **Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

The Last Day is coming. What makes Jesus the perfect judge? What makes Jesus the judge we would want to encounter?

Because of who Jesus is, who God is.

The cross is the coronation ceremony for Jesus. The cross *is the way* in which Jesus ascends his throne, takes his crown, and begins his rule. *For it is in dying, that Jesus has saved the whole world.*

There are, so far as I can tell, two illustrious crown jewels that reveal who God is — the Creation and the Crucifixion.

In Creation, we find that God so desires his people, that he makes the cosmos, time, the earth and everything in it, and mankind — that first man and woman. The creation is the unalterable testament that God wants life, wants mankind, wants us around. There is nothing so clear as Creation that could tell us this — except for, of course, that second crown jewel — the Crucifixion.

In the Crucifixion, we find again just how desirous God is to be with his people — so much so that the Son of God goes to his death for them — for us. The swirling, suffocating forces of evil — the hearts of man, the shrills of demons, *Death* itself — these Christ conquers. His method of conquering, his method of taking the throne, is through his death — not in killing others, but in dying himself. It's worth emphasizing one more detail about his death — just as this faith-filled criminal confessed — his death was *undeserved*; he had done nothing wrong.

How much is an innocent life worth? How much is the life of the innocent Son of God worth? What power does his sacrifice have? As innocent, as Man, as the Son of God, his sacrifice can never be tapped, for it is uncountably infinite, immeasurable, overflowing — pouring out into the hearts and minds and bodies of those whom he saves.

The Crucifixion reveals that God *deeply, powerfully* desires to be with his people. And this Sacrifice of Jesus also reveals something fundamental to God's very being, to who God is — his sacrifice is not an exception, it's the rule. Who God is *is to be sacrificial*, is to give of Himself. Indeed, is this not what He has done from the very beginning, from Creation itself? Wasn't Him creating the cosmos itself sacrificial? Didn't He pour himself out in the very making of the world and of us? And yet, when God pours Himself out, that does not make him *less God*, or *less than* He was before — for this is his very nature. Because who He is is to pour Himself out for the sake of those whom He loves.

This is the great trinitarian mystery to which we have been let in on — He has always poured himself out for the sake of those whom He loves.

And so, on the cross, we have the chief and central sacrifice — the pouring out of the love and of the blood of God — for the forgiveness of sins, for the sake of the whole world, that all would be drawn to his goodness and glory and be saved.

What is more glorious and more good than the one whom you love — indeed, the one who *loves* you — giving up his very life for you?

What makes Jesus the perfect Judge of the living and the dead? Who He is, his sacrificial nature, his dying to pour himself out for the sake of those whom he loves — his people, you and me. This is also exactly what makes Jesus the perfect King — one who is perfectly just, perfectly loving, perfectly sacrificial. And that is why we desire Christ's return — for he will judge all things, making all things right and good and true.

And so, knowing who Jesus is, let us return to the scene of his crucifixion, with the two criminals on either side.

The two criminals give us a lens with which to see the judgment that is to come on that Last Day. One criminal *railed against* Jesus — demanding to be saved from dying:

“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

This was, remember, the third time that the identity of Jesus was questioned — first by the rulers, then by the soldiers, and now by this criminal. What did he expect Jesus to do? Did he expect Jesus to say: “I was waiting for a few more people to question whether I was the Christ or not before I got up and got down off this cross”? Or, “I was just making sure everyone was here first before I saved myself.” Or, “You’re right, let me go ahead and get down now.”

Though Jesus, of course, had the power to save himself, that is not who he is or why he came. He came to demonstrate the love of God, which is sacrificial by nature, and so his silence, his presence, and his death *in fact* speak clearly that He is the Christ. He had already prayed that the cup would pass, but it would not — and so he was intent to drink the full cup. This is consistent with what he had taught and what he had promised — *that those who seek to save their lives, will lose them; those who give up their lives, will save them.*

And so, we turn to the second criminal, the one who confessed his faith in Jesus in response to the first:

“Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”

41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

What faith! The disciples have fled or watch from a distance, the crowds see the spectacle of this crucifixion, the rulers continue to deride Jesus, the soldiers mock him, and the other criminal demands to be saved. What a contrast, then, is this lonely soul, freely confessing his guilt, freely accepting the punishment of death for his crime, freely confessing that *Jesus is sinless, that Jesus will be king, that Jesus will have the power to remember him and do something about him.*

This is no meager deathbed conversion. His is an unrivaled proclamation proclamation of faith.

There, on the cross, Jesus is dying — and yet this criminal *believes* that Jesus is King and will have a kingdom and will remember him. No one else — in that moment — in the whole world had *that* faith. Here, from the mouth of this criminal, Jesus receives the adoration and praise that is fitting and right for the King of the Jews, the King of Glory.

May God bless us with the faith, courage, and conviction of this criminal. Together with this criminal, we confess that Jesus is the King, who will come to judge the living and the dead, who will reign eternally, always and ever worthy of all honor, glory, and praise.

✠ **All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.**