

✝ 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 a parable about two men who went to pray.

Jesus tells us who God favors in this parable: the tax collector, not the Pharisee — and that's because the Pharisee put himself above the tax collector.

Once we place ourselves above someone else, we have exalted ourselves, and our Lord's words convict us: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Whatever we may think or feel or even believe we know to be the case about others, we cannot put ourselves above others. We can be confident, that when we do, God *will* humble us. For he must bring down everyone who does not belong there.

There is one central, chief, unalterable reason for this — our Lord Jesus — God-and-man — did not place himself above others. Our Lord Jesus humbled himself, coming down from heaven, placing himself below mankind, as a servant, suffering pain and death for us. And because our Lord Jesus humbled himself, God exalted him even on the cross. And there, on the cross, Christ's glory shines *ever brighter and clearer and crisper* as the dawn of his return draws nearer.

Following our Lord Jesus, we do not place ourselves *above* others, but rather we place others *above* us — not to put ourselves down, but to raise others up.

**II. LAST WEEK** WE HEARD ABOUT the blessings Jesus promises to the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, and about the curses Jesus promises to the rich, the full, the laughing, the reputable.

The key to this passage and to every passage in the Scriptures is found in this question: What in this passage points to, or is chiefly about, our Lord Jesus?

Jesus, maker of all things, did not think himself too highly or too good to become poor, hungry, weeping, and hated. He deserved, quite obviously, none of these things. But nonetheless, he did not think himself too great or too good for us to not fully enter into man's condition.

If God the Son is not too great or too good to become poor, hungry, weeping, hated — what right do any of us have to *demand* that we not be poor, hungry, weeping, or hated? We have no right, no claim to such things. And yet, God promises a blessing surpassingly greater — the very kingdom of God — to all the saints.

No matter what the current state of the world may look like, *All Saints Sunday* and the judgment that is to come reminds us that what may look like loss, setback, or the defeat of Christianity, is always and everywhere the outplaying of *the winning hand*. When impoverished Nigerian Christians are systematically killed by Islamists, it may look like the death of Christianity. But it is not. When fewer and fewer Christians in the West turn to faith, it may look like the end of Christianity, but it is not.

What is coming is vindication and victory. The saints will win; there is no other option, no other outcome.

Because Jesus is our judge, because we believe him, because we take what he says to us to heart, the Day of Judgment is the day of victory — the day of his victory, and therefore our victory. The day the dead in Christ rise and the day that we are given a share in his eternal glory.

The Day of Judgment is the day when all the Christians who have gone before are raised from the dead, when he brings them (us) into his heavenly kingdom, when Christ says: "Blessed are you," and when we erupt in songs of endless praise.

**III. THIS MORNING** WE HEARD that the Sadducees set a trap for Jesus, thinking that they had proved that there is no resurrection.

It is a sad and strange set of affairs that the Sadducees were so devoted to the belief that there was no resurrection. It's an absolutely obstinate and untenable belief, even from the Old Testament Scriptures. Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son from the dead. Abraham believed that his son, whom God told him to sacrifice, would return with him *alive*. And Job, in our Old Testament passage from this morning, testifies:

26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God,  
27 whom I shall see for myself,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Job believed that he would be raised from the dead *in the flesh*, and that he would see God. So if God can raise the widow of Zarephath's son, why wouldn't he be able to raise Abraham's son, or Job, or indeed the whole people of God? If Abraham believed that God could raise his son from the dead, what right do the Sadducees have to reject the resurrection? If Job believes that God will raise him from the dead *and* that he will see God face-to-face, why would the Sadducees reject the witness of Job?

The Sadducees, it seems, are just like the people in our day who love to bring up passages out of context, to supposedly "disprove" the Scriptures or the gospel or the resurrection of Jesus. They have no interest in believing the Scriptures; they have a vested interest in *disbelieving* the Scriptures. We can likely bring to mind a person or two who fits this description, who believe that the Bible is inconsistent and inaccurate. Let us reject the way of the Sadducees, if any of this rejection of the Scriptures has taken root in our own hearts.

For puzzles are not meant to be left un-put-together. It is one thing, of course, to say that there are puzzles and curiosities in the Scriptures — indeed, Jesus' own parables are evidence of this. But it is quite another thing to say that the puzzles in Scripture have no clear image, no purpose, no picture on the front of the puzzle box, so to speak, to follow. Quite the contrary, the whole of Scripture — Old & New Testaments — reveals our Lord Jesus. And so, because the whole of Scripture reveals him, it is no surprise that the trap set by the Sadducees is a rather pathetic trap.

Let's hear that trap again. A woman marries a man who happens to have six other brothers. The couple childless; the man dies. And so, by Mosaic Law, the next brother-in-line would take the widow to be his wife. This practice is called *levirate* marriage. But so it goes, as the men keep dying, all childless, and the woman as well. The trap, the Sadducees believe, lies in the question of which of the brothers could claim her as wife *in the resurrection*. None had children. Not all seven could claim her! And therefore, there must be no resurrection.

As we have already seen, Abraham, Job, Elijah all believed in the resurrection, and we would find, were we to search through the rest of the Old Testament, that the resurrection is well-attested throughout. Any of these passages would be good evidence for the resurrection. But Jesus uses none of these passages. He is far clearer than us. He goes straight to a passage that speaks to *who God is*, the passage where God reveals his name to Moses as *I AM*, the passage about the burning bush.

God says this about himself, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob." And this is, it turns out, the best case for the resurrection, because it has to do with who God is, not just what God can do or what he has already done, but *who he is*. Notice that God does not use the past tense. God did not say, "I was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob," who have all died, and I am therefore looking to be the God of someone else. No—God says *He is* the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob — he's still their God. On this side of the grave, no one will ever hear from Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob again. Not so with God.

CS Lewis, in *A Grief Observed*, wrote this about the grief of coming to terms with the death of his wife Joy:

*“I look up at the night sky. Is anything more certain than that in all those vast times and spaces, if I were allowed to search them, I should nowhere find her face, her voice, her touch? She died. She is dead. Is the word so difficult to learn?”*

CS Lewis, on this side of the grave, could not have ever found his wife or been able to speak to her again. Now that CS Lewis has died, the same is true for us with him — we will never find him or hear from CS Lewis again. And the same is true of all whom we have known or loved who have gone before us — we will never *from here* see them again. Not in this life. Not in this age.

But this is not true of God. 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. God still knows all those who have gone before us as alive.

And so, in Jesus’ response to the Sadducees, we are reminded of God’s supreme power and knowledge — nothing can escape being known by him. There is nothing that will ever have been that is not known by him. God is above all things, knows all things, is in charge of all things — and not even death can separate anything from him. But we must mention the one thing that can separate someone from him — Himself.

Only God can separate someone from him, and he has given this power to Jesus — the power to banish those who have rejected Jesus and his resurrection and his forgiveness to eternity in hell. Hell is usually an uncomfortable idea to our (so-called) modern sensibilities, to our ears, but this uncomfortableness does not make it any less true. Hell is real and true, and thus will be infinitely more uncomfortable for those who are banished from God’s presence there, than us simply speaking of it in this life. It will do us no good to be afraid of speaking of any of those things which our Lord Jesus himself has spoken of.

In the part of the passage that was omitted from Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, we would have heard this:

*[6] since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [7] and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [8] in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8, ESV)*

The Thessalonians were suffering for rejecting idols and for believing the resurrection of Jesus. So here, Paul warns that those who persecute the saints — and who do not repent, and who do not believe that the risen Jesus is the Christ — will suffer *because* they have persecuted Christ’s body.

The good news of the resurrection of Jesus is absolutely open and available to any and to all — and the good news of the resurrection includes the news that those who reject *salvation* will be cursed for eternity.

When we wonder about the state of our world, about the evils perpetrated herein, about the glorification of immorality, greed, and death, we have confidence that the day is coming when all these things will come to a certain and definite end.

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

And — even the most evil who repent and place their hope in Jesus will join the saints on the Last Day. But it is also true that even the nicest person who never repents and never trusts Jesus will *not join* the saints on the Last Day. (For there is nothing nice about rejecting the risen Jesus and his gifts of forgiveness and life.)

God is not gathering together the people we may think are really nice or excluding the people we may believe are evil; God is gathering together all who have placed their hope in him — Pharisee or tax collector — and excluding all those who reject Jesus — nice or evil. Remember, we do not believe that our works save us; none of

us can be nice enough or good enough to “make it.” Thanks be to God that Jesus does not require perfection *from us*, but lavishes forgiveness and eternal life on us freely.

A final note. Marriage is for this life. We will not enjoy marriage in the life to come. And that has the corollary that children are also for this life.

Therefore cherish your spouse and your children in this life. And if either spouse or child has died, know that they are not dead to the Lord. And if you have never married or had children, know that you participate in the great gift of life through the Church.

There will be but one marriage in the life to come — that between our Lord Jesus Christ and his Bride, the Church. And that means this — everything that is the Lord’s, he will share with his Bride.

Thus the Lord *shares his eternal life and his eternal glory and himself* with us. These are the great gifts in the life to come.

For Christ will come again **to judge the living and the dead.**

Therefore, let us bless the Lord — for he is worthy of all things, both in this life and in the life to come.

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