

✝ 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 ABOUT the blessings Jesus promises to the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, and about the curses Jesus promises to the the rich, the full, the laughing, the reputable.

We are immediately reminded that Jesus, maker of all things, did not think himself too highly or too good to become poor, hungry, weeping, and hated.

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 remain rich, full, laughing, and reputable? We have no right, no claim to such things. And so, like him, we share the riches, fullness, laughter, and reputation we have with those who have little or none. For God promises a blessing surpassingly greater than these things — the very kingdom of God — to all the saints.

No matter what it seems like for the saints in this life, *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.

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

II. LAST WEEK 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. What right did the Sadducees have to reject the very resurrection their forefathers believed?

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 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. But — if any of this rejection of the Scriptures has taken root in our own hearts, let it be uprooted. Let us reject the way of the Sadducees.

There are, of course, puzzles in Scripture. But what are puzzles 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, in Jesus' response to the Sadducees—“I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob—we are reminded of who God is — his 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.

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 has promised to 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.

III. THIS MORNING 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? This world is condemned because it has killed the very one through whom the world was made. And so, the end of this world is coming; this age is coming to an end. Though this world is not coming to an end *immediately* or *all at once*. As Jesus tells his disciples: “these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

That the end will not be at once is, of course, obvious (to us). In AD 70, Jerusalem was destroyed. The Temple was destroyed — though not every single stone *yet*. Yet two thousand years later, here we are — the church continues to grow and to spread the good news of the resurrection of Jesus and his free offer of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. But, at the same time, it seems things are unraveling — the church is in apparent decline in the West; Jerusalem is again a place of war and tumult; and with the rise of AI, people are beginning to wonder if *this* is how the antichrist (the man of lawlessness as the Thessalonians letter puts it) comes.

And so, given our cultural moment, but more than that — given our Scriptures from today, and the ones we have been hearing for the last month, and the ones we will hear as we reach the Advent season, it's worth spending time hearing about *the end of this age*.

Our Creed and our Liturgy help us.

Christ has died. **Christ is risen. Christ will come again.** And what will he do when he returns? He is coming to **judge the living and the dead.**

That's what we've been hearing. But to make it plain — this age and this world are coming to an end. Again, how could this world endure after putting to death the Son of God?

And so, we might wonder — why didn't the world end *immediately*? Why wasn't the death of Jesus on the cross the complete and final end of this world and this age? Because the death of Jesus on the cross accomplished two things. His death on the cross *condemned* this world and *gave birth* to the age that is to come — the one where all those who put their hope in Jesus inherit eternal life with him. We Christians live in two worlds, in two different ages, at the same time.

We remain stewards of this world. We marry and rear children. We work and are productive. We play and we mourn. We are caretakers of all that we have been given — our lives, our families, our finances, our land, our heritage, our time. And all the while, as we care for all that we have been given in this life, we invest in eternity. To put it another way, all that we do here on earth is not for nothing; it *matters*. How we live and work and play matters. What we sow in this life — all that is good and godly — is fruitful for the life that is to come.

The chief fruit is the soul — the man or woman or child who hears the gospel and believes and therefore joins the Lord with all his saints in the age that is to come. This is the central reason that the Lord has not yet returned and that the world has not been fully judged — the harvest of souls has not been fully brought in. And so, the good news of the resurrection of Jesus and of repentance for the forgiveness of sins continues to be spoken, here, and throughout the world, until the full number of all who will believe *do believe*. This is by God's

grace, by God's favor, that he waits patiently for all those who will turn to him, to turn to him. The end of this world is coming quickly — as it always has been — but it will not end until the full number of those who believe, believe. For the mercy of the Lord endures forever.

But there is something else that must happen, too. The antichrist must come, and he will come with signs and wonders. He will do everything he can to deceive those who have believed the gospel of Jesus. He will seek worship that is only right to give to God. And many will be deceived by him. Indeed, just as there is the full number of those who will believe Jesus, so, too, there is a full number of those who will be deceived. But, another way to put it is this — the full number of those who *want* to be deceived will be deceived, the full number of those who *want* to practice evil will believe their right to practice evil; the full number of those who seek to turn away from God will turn from him.

Whoever can be saved, will be saved; whoever refuses to be saved, will not be saved.

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 — 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. As the end of this age draws to an end, the full darkness that will be is embodied in the antichrist, who, again, tries to take 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, quick. And — though evil will be at its worst, yet still the light of Christ will pierce through even this blackest blanket of darkness.

We might wonder — Does the antichrist have to come? Has the antichrist already come? Let's start with the latter — we can list candidates: Caligula, Nero, Lenin, Hitler, Stalin. There have been others; there will be more candidates to come. And these certainly have characteristics of the antichrist. But none of these fit the full deprivation of who the antichrist will be — none of these came with signs and wonders. The antichrist will.

Does the antichrist have to come? One of the most helpful ways to understand evil is that it is *the lack* of the good. In this way, as man rebelled against his creator, he was *deprived* of his fullness and fell from grace, fell from that which is good, fell from that which comes from God. Just as darkness is the absence of light, so too evil is the absence (or lack) of good.

And so, as the resplendence and radiance and glory of Christ Jesus is made known, the *lack* of resplendence and radiance and glory in creation is *revealed*. In other words, as the gospel spreads throughout the world throughout time, so too does the unveiling of evil — for the light shines in the darkness. And so, this evil will, in due time, try to eclipse the glory and radiance of Christ.

It will seem for a moment like evil will win the day. But it will not. For then Christ will appear in glory, and the antichrist will be exposed, as does all darkness when the light shines. And on that Day that Christ returns, the whole creation will be exultant that the Judge has come — for evil will have reached its darkest, and the saints will be in great need of the only one who can make all things right. And then the Lord will raise the dead, and he will judge the living and the dead, and all those who are saints will be transformed in glory, and we will be with him forever and ever, unto the ages of ages, Amen.

Take heart — we will be taken into glory with our Lord Jesus. But the end is not yet. God has put each of us here at this time by his will and for his purpose and for his glory.

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.

And now, receive this blessing with which Paul closed his second letter to the Thessalonians:

[16] Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. (2 Thessalonians 3:16, ESV)

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