

# **“How do We Inherit the Kingdom of Heaven?”**

## **Last Sunday Matthew 25:34**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

With our eyes fixed firmly forward, we celebrate this week an event which has not happened, but which is as sure as any event from the past, for it is found in the Word of God. Jesus has given us His promise to return, so we can gather on this Sunday and celebrate the return of Christ the King, even though we have not yet seen that day.

The kingdom of this world and its pestilent ruler have us in their grips. Too often we obey their rules and live our lives according to their principles. That is nowhere more clearly seen than in our thinking about our own deaths. A thrall to the biological realities of our bodies, we can strive mightily against the day of our death, but it is a losing battle. Doctors lose all their patients, eventually.

As Christians, it seems the machinery of this hateful regime wants to define our lives as insignificant, worthless, and small. We are but tiny parts of this vast universe. We look at the vast interstellar distances, the teeming billions on this planet, the economic forces which make a mockery of our financial plans, and we are utterly powerless over our destiny and helpless to change it.

Moreover, this Gospel text can scare the life right out of us. It tells us that we might be goats, and that Jesus is watching what we do. We might have really screwed this whole thing up and we don't have to look too hard into our own lives to see where we have failed to give that cup of cold water and that crust of bread when it would have been so easy for us to do.

Our Collect today said, “Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own, from the foundation of the world.”

These words of the Collect seem like madness. Fix our eyes on a kingdom we cannot see, a kingdom which is described as perfect and holy? We need to, it seems to me, fix our eyes on the Judge, the terrible and holy judge who will render judgment on our lives. We need to keep that in mind so we may live accordingly.

But that is not what we pray for. And there is a good reason we do not. Consider this sermon illustration:

A man was out of work and desperate for a job. He finally saw a help wanted sign on the door of a bank and went in to apply. Not having any banking experience, he was shocked when they offered him the position of comptroller of the bank. "I can't do that job, I don't know what it even is!" he exclaimed to the interviewer. But the man behind the desk said, "We will train you, don't worry."

Desperate for work, he accepted the position and arrived to work the very next day, excited to finally be gainfully employed again. They brought him into a very messy office with a desk, lots of files stacked all over the place, and strange stamping sorts of machines on the counters, none of which he knew how to use. As the branch president walked out the door, he said to the man, "Oh, by the way, the regulators will be here in three days to look at the books."

Suddenly it dawned on the man what this was all about. He was the fall guy, the one they would blame when the regulators realized that things were not right. Staring at the mountains of files and strange machines and thick binders all around him, he put his head in his hands and was about to despair.

But suddenly a young woman poked her head in the door and asked, "Do you need some help?" "Yes," said the man. "I am totally lost." She smiled at him and got right to work. Together they began to tackle the files and put the machines where they belonged. The binders were all sorted and put in the right places and the computers were synchronized. For three very long days they labored on the task of getting the comptroller's office back in shape.

After the third day, the night before the regulators were arriving, he went home. The office looked much better, but he really had no idea if all their work was in vain or not. After all, he had no idea what it was supposed to be like. It was a sleepless night as he pondered what would happen.

If the bank failed the regulator's inspection, he wondered if he would be liable for something. Would he be put in jail? Would he be fined? What would happen in the morning? With a great deal of fear and anxiety he walked into his office and took his place behind that now clean desk and surveyed all the work they had done. Would it be enough?

The knock came at 9:30. A receptionist said the bank regulator was here. "Show him in," he said. His heart was in his throat. But imagine his surprise when the person who walked through the door was the very same young woman who had helped him for the past three days. And imagine his relief when he realized that the **work** she would be judging would be her **own** and not really his.

You see, God has made Jesus the judge of the world. For anyone whose forehead has been wet with the water of baptism; for anyone who has heard the sweet words of an absolution declare that all his or her sins are forgiven; those are sweet words. When we confess in the second article of the creed that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, we ought to jump up and shout "Hurray!"

Our judge is not just some terrible, pure, and omnipotent deity. Our judge is none other than the One who died for us. The final judgment is not a judgment of our lives, but of His sacrifice. Was it enough? He has only to look at His hands and feet to know what punishment has already been born for our sins. Was it enough? Yes, it was. His resurrection from the dead shouts that fact. We can fix our eyes on the kingdom and joy which are ours in His name. We can wait in hope and not in fear.

We are both sinners and saints at the same time. We can look forward to the judgment on the last day because the sinner part of that equation was dealt with on Good Friday and on the cross where Jesus died. The judgment is all about the saint part, the gift of Jesus' righteousness which was imparted to us on the day of our baptisms.

Keeping our eyes fixed on the kingdom is keeping our eyes fixed on the kingdom **moments** we experience right now, the Sacraments, the Absolution, the forgiveness, the love, all the things that belong to that now/not yet kingdom.

Christ has come to establish his kingdom of grace and peace – His disciples are sent out to proclaim his kingdom and in their proclamation that kingdom comes. That kingdom is not just nice words and happy thoughts. Jesus has conquered our greatest foes and His kingdom means their undoing. He loves His disciples as He loves Himself.

By the strange and upside-down economy of God's love, He has looked us in the eyes in our Baptisms; He has united us not only into some great network of Christian people around the world, but more importantly, into Himself. He has intimately come into our lives in the sacrament of Communion. We are sanctified.

Now what happens to us happens to Him. We are important to Him. Our problems are real problems and He has become our real solution. Jesus has made our lives incredibly valuable to Him. We are unique, precious, and redeemed children of God.

And that means that His kingdom **is** a kingdom of hope and His Judgment will not be a day of fear for us. We do not need to find our meaning or our security in anything else. He has spoken sweet words of redemption and peace to us. We are the sheep of His pasture. We are welcomed into His holy courts. We are raised from the dead in Christ.

And may the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!