

JUDGMENT DAY  
Matthew 25: 31-41a ;45b-46

If you are like many people, there has been a time in your life when, after some minor catastrophes at home or at work, you have said something like: “Oh well, it’s not the end of the world!” At the beginning of the summer, stocks dropped so precipitously that some people might have thought we were entering a catastrophic time. Some consider the so-called McKinney Fire in California near the Oregon border as a true catastrophe as it claimed more than 55,000 acres. Some in Kentucky consider the extreme flooding a catastrophe. Others say the end of the world as we know will happen according to Biblical signs or political changes centering around Israel. But Jesus said, just before our passage today, in Matthew 24:

Immediately after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

The last line is most important; *But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

Someday judgment day will come. Some have suggested that it will be “when the stars begin to fall.” Some say when astrologers notice changes in the moon or the stars it will happen. But none of the worst days we have experienced so far will hold a candle to Judgment Day. For the unfaithful, it is faced with dread. The second Coming of Christ is said to leave behind those who are unfaithful, while Christ will come and collect the faithful, who are alive, and meet those who have already died in the clouds, and together they will be taken up into heaven. Did you know that the

type most newspapers use for astounding events is called “Second Coming” type? It has large, heavy black letters reserved only for the most stupendous and earth-shaking front-page news—such as the return of Jesus Christ. That type of banner was used to announce the surrender of Germany on May 7, 1945, and the surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945. It was used to announce the assassination of President Kennedy, the shooting of President Reagan, the attack on 9/11 and most recently with the breaching of the Capitol building on January 6, 2021. One day, who know when, the world will witness the great event for which the second coming type is named: the return of Jesus Christ. As the Nicene Creed puts it, “He will come again in glory *to judge both the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.*” ***His kingdom will have no end.*** Many people in our world want to point to apocalyptic signs and declare the end is near. But in spite of what catastrophes may come, again, Jesus said in Matthew 24: “Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name says, ‘I am the Christ’ and they will lead many astray And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this *must* take place, ***but the end is not yet.***” From the perspective of the world’s age, the end may be in the distant future. Scientists claim that the universe is 20 billion years old, and that humanity was 5 billion years in development. The earth may freeze or be burned into a cinder by the sun, but the sun has warmed the earth for three and a half billion years and is predicted to not burn out for another 5 billion years. The end, however, may appear sooner than we expect it, not by a decree from above, but from either nuclear explosions with radiation fallout, or intense pollution that makes water undrinkable or land unlivable. So often we relegate judgment day to the topics of gospel songs or revivals and not something immanent enough to change our lives. We’re not sure it can happen when we are still alive! The story is told of a pastor who one day was going to a hospital to visit a congregation member. She had been brought in with pneumonia and was being treated for it. The pastor sat by the bed to

learn how she was doing, and also how she was thinking and feeling. All in all, it was a good visit. Before he arose, he prayed: “And Lord, we pray that you restore Kathleen to health by the healing power of your Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.” As he arose to leave, he was startled to see Kathleen starting to get out of bed too! “Wait a minute!” the pastor protested. “You can’t do that! You have to stay in bed and rest!” “Why?” the woman asked. “I am no longer sick. I too prayed that I would be healed, and when we finished that prayer, something inside me told me that I was! I am all better.” She thanked her pastor with all her heart and told him she would be fine now. The pastor walked back to his car, turned the key, and waited a moment before driving away. “He looked up and said, “Dear Lord, please don’t ever do that to me again!” He was so started by the power of their prayers! But do we truly pray with an expectation of a result? We pray every week, “Thy Kingdom come,” yet how many of us would act like that pastor if we saw the kingdom come in our midst? The apocalyptic writings of Daniel and Jesus’ words in Matthew are seen as mysterious and fearful. That’s what that day is all about. Jesus even told a story about a king who would come, separating sheep from goats, putting goats on his left hand and sheep on his right. To those on his left who had done nothing for him, he will say, “Depart from me.” And to those on his right who had done helpful things for others, Jesus said they were done to him too. I am left-handed; many here are. But I always baptize, and always bless with my right hand because the Bible, and in large part the people in our world believe the right hand is the hand of blessing. May we live each day as if it were our last, so that we are living prepared, not blissfully moving through life with no plan, no will, and no Savior.

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