



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 9, 2008

End Time 2 – Last Judgment

Daniel 7:9, 10

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Daniel 7:9, 10

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90

Second Lesson: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

The Ancient of Days Judges

With royal splendor

With royal authority

I'm guessing, unless you wore it as a costume for Halloween, none of you have one of those funny-looking white wigs that the British judges wear when they sit and judge. You don't really put one of those on when you are going to discipline your kids, do you parents, and say "now I'm about to judge and hand down the sentence on your behavior"? We don't really have any of those kinds of wigs, but we sure wear them a lot, figuratively speaking, don't we? In our day-to-day life we spend an awful lot of time judging stuff.

It was kind of driven home to me on Thursday when Paula's folks were here visiting. We went out to eat for lunch and we were sitting some place where the tables were kind of close together. I actually thought that if I got the people on the table right next to me to look the other way, I could have grabbed their fries and ate whatever I wanted. That's how close together we were sitting.

I say that because I don't want you to think I sit around at restaurants just eaves dropping on peoples' conversations, but they were right next to me. When she was talking to the other people at her table, it was like she was talking right into my ear. That's what it felt like.

As I sat and listened as they were talking, it dawned on me that they were wearing these white wigs even though they didn't have them on. I heard that basically everyone that they had come into contact with that week and that month were all a bunch of idiots who didn't know what they were doing and they couldn't do anything right. They were wearing those judges' wigs.

The one woman's husband evidently was in a nursing home and the people in the nursing home have absolutely no love, no compassion, and take no care of her husband. They just are terrible rotten people is what I heard. I kind of thought to myself, "I bet there's another side to that story." But when we get busy judging and a lot of times we've made up our mind, we don't always hear the other side of the story, like those people that are seeking to take care of that woman's husband the best they could.

I got to thinking a little bit about it the rest of the day and thought to myself, how often do we do this? How often do we judge someone else without knowing all the facts? The very nature of who you and I are is that we have limited knowledge. You kids know that. You're parents don't know everything you do, right? We have limited knowledge. We don't always have all the facts. It's kind of interesting then, isn't it, that it doesn't stop us from sitting on the judge's chair and acting like we know everything about everyone and what everyone else is doing.

This morning we meet someone who does have that white wooly hair in this vision that Daniel had, and he is sitting on his judge's seat. And he does know every last thing. We are reminded of that when the Ancient of Days takes his seat and we see his royal authority and his royal splendor. We see that when he judges, he does it with this splendor that you and I will never have and with an authority to judge that you and I really don't have. As we consider that, maybe it will give us a little bit of pause to keep us from jumping from some of the conclusions we often do.

Last week we looked at Daniel when Daniel's enemies wanted to make him Purina Lion Chow. Remember we looked at Daniel and the Lion's Den? We talked about the context of Daniel a little bit. That's important to remember in connection with these visions that Daniel was having that God had given him in this dream.

Remember, Daniel had been carried away shortly before the Israelites were even conquered by the Babylonians. That happened in 586 B.C. About 605 B.C., Daniel and the cream of the crop of the kingdom of Judah had been taken off to Babylon. Daniel now had been serving in Babylon. His name had been changed. He had been taught the language. He had been appointed to serve in the government for 60-70 years by the time that he is writing his prophetic book here. Sixty to seventy years away from his homeland. Sixty to seventy years of not being able to worship in the temple. Sixty to seventy years of kneeling three times a day facing that temple and praying to his God, no doubt praying "God deliver my people. Take them back. Bring them back to where you have caused your name to dwell in Jerusalem."

In the midst of that comes this vision of these four beasts, which is what I read to you is a part of. There were four beasts that Daniel was told symbolized kingdoms. The first beast was like a lion and had wings like an eagle. Then there was the second beast which looked like a bear. Then there was another beast that looked like a leopard and it had four wings like those of a bird. Then after that, there was a fourth beast, terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth. It crushed and devoured some victims. God then later told Daniel in this vision that these four beasts were four kingdoms—one of which he was living under right now—but there were three more kingdoms to come that would appear to just terrorize God's people. We are told as you read this chapter of Daniel, over and over Daniel says, "Boy, this just disturbed me. It tied my stomach up in knots. It made me real worried. I didn't know what was going on so I asked someone and they explained it to me."

Can you imagine being those people that are living there 60-70 years away from home and God comes and brings Daniel a vision of more and more kingdoms that are going to come after this one falls, and there is still going to be a challenge to your people? That would make the pit of your stomach fall, wouldn't it? That's why this section of the vision that we looked at is so very, very important—those two verses that I read to you. Because it says that even though there are all these earthly kingdoms, there is someone who is above all these earthly kingdoms—the Ancient of Days—and there will come a time when he will take his throne. He has been looking over all these kingdoms all along and using them to accomplish his good purposes—using even the sins that he didn't cause them to commit to the advantage of those who are his own, his church. But he does say there is a day that will come when this Ancient of Days, the picture of God himself, the eternal God, will take his seat and he will judge everyone.

He tells us a little bit about the one who sits at his throne. He tells us the court is brought together—there's judgment going on. But the picture he paints of the eternal God is something that should make us aware and it should make us think about some things a little differently. It tells us his hair was white, right? It tells us his clothing was as white as snow. His head of hair was white like wool. In this vision, that is symbolizing that God is not smudged or stained in any way like you and I are. The picture of pure white is God's holiness.

That's something we need to remember as we go through our life in this world because sometimes we think God doesn't always know what's going on or he's letting things go on that actually aren't all that good that he should have changed. And when we are saying, "God, you haven't done this right," we are really accusing God of having smudged or stained clothes, right? We are saying that he hasn't done everything perfectly.

Do you and I really want to accuse God of that? Do we really think that we know better how the world should run than God does? Of course, at times we do, don't we? "God, you've screwed up. You should have done this. You should have done that. You're clothes aren't all that white. I know better." You and I do that all the time because we have a sinful nature that is hostile to God and we think we know better than God. But the facts remain that God is the one whose clothing is un-smudged. The facts remain that if you are going to have a vision of you and me, our hair isn't going to be completely white like wool and our clothes certainly aren't going to be snow, are they? Are they even going to be polka dotted? Is there going to be any white showing through if God had a vision of what you and I are actually like?

We are a little more than smudged. We are sin through and through. Unless God acts, we have nothing to offer to him. Unless God does something in us first, we have nothing. We aren't holy.

Another picture of the splendor of the Ancient of Days as he takes his throne—he is sitting on a throne that's burning, it's fire. And the wheels of it are burning, their fire. Now don't get the idea that God's sitting in a wheel chair. Think more of a war chariot—

a flaming war chariot. It talks about his power. It talks about his glory also, doesn't it? Throughout Scripture, think of how fire was used in connection with God. God revealed himself in fire throughout the Old Testament, didn't he? He speaks of it also in the New Testament. The glory of the Lord that led the children of Israel by night was a pillar of fire. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush with his fire. God caused his glory to inhabit the temple, the Holy of Holies, as this fire came down and went into the Holy of Holies. God's picture of fire is his incredible eternal glory and the fire that not only is the fire that goes out from him, that river of fire that goes out from him that goes into all the world, is not only the Law which consumes, which accuses and consumes—fire consumes, right? But fire also purifies. The fire that goes out from his throne is also that purifying fire of the Gospel which refines us and burns away our impurities. It refines us like gold that is refined in the fire.

God's Law and his Gospel is this fire that proceeds from his throne and goes out through the whole world. This message that although our garments are stained and smudged and the Law shows us this and it threatens us with completely being consumed by that fire, God also says to us, "I sent my Son to live and die in your place. He has taken away all your sins." And the Spirit gives you the gift of faith. And the more time you spend with that Spirit through the Word and the Sacraments, your faith is strengthened. That fire refines and strengthens your faith so that more and more of the new self wins the battles against the old self.

This is the picture of that fire, the splendor that comes out from the Ancient of Days—his Gospel message, his Law going out into the entire world. He acts and does all things well.

Once again, what would it look like if God gave a vision to you of you seated on this throne? Would it necessarily be a river of fire that's going out from you? When you have judged your neighbors, your friends, your coworkers, have you done it with the pure glory of God's Law and Gospel? Or have you done it with "it seems to me"? Have you done it with a heart that isn't full of love but a heart that is full of bitterness and anger? I have to believe if God gave me a vision of what it looks like, what comes out from me and goes out to others, it isn't always fire. It's something a little less cleansing, right? What comes out from us is often vile, bitterness and anger.

The other thing that is kind of interesting is that what comes out from us isn't the same authority that God has. He has this authority to judge all because he is the Creator of all. We don't always have authority to judge the ones that we are judging. And quite often where God has given us the authority and where he has told us to teach and admonish one another, we don't do that. We go and talk to someone else about someone else's problems. We don't go to that person and say, "I'm kind of worried because you are caught up in this sin" whatever it might be.

I've been here seven years I think now, something like that. In seven years, I've had members come to me twice and say, "Pastor, what you did in this area was wrong." So I'm doing pretty well if I only sinned twice in seven years, right? But I wonder how often

people have talked to one another about how stupid I am and all the foolish things I've done.

God has given you and me authority to speak in some areas as parents. He has given us authority to correct the wrong and point out the right to our children, right? In our lives, we have authority that he has called on us to use to teach and admonish one another. But he has never said to us that we have the authority to sit in judgment over those that he has not given us authority over. And he has never, ever said if you have authority over someone, just sit and talk about it. He has told us to go talk to them.

In our community, our congregation, our relationships, we don't always use the authority God has given us and quite often we overstep our authority. But here's the amazing thing. When our God judges, he judges with complete and total authority based on fact. It says that even though there are these thousands upon thousands of angels there around him to do his bidding, when he comes to judge, he opens the Book. It's all based on fact.

Here's the comforting thing for you and me. This doesn't have to scare us that he is going to list all the rotten things that we've done that we don't want anyone else to know about. When God looks at you and me, who believe that Jesus lived and died in our place, he doesn't see all those stupid things that we do, the foolish things that we say, the horrible things that we think. He sees the perfection of Jesus Christ. He sees the body and blood that was given and shed to take away our sins. He sees our garments not smudged like they are. He sees us as white and as pure as snow because we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

That's why this Judgment Day is not for us a day of wrath and mourning, but it's a day of comfort. It's a day of joy because we will be with the Lord forever and we know that our sins have been taken away through the life and death of Christ.

God judges in authority. He knows those who are his own—that Book of Remembrance that we talked about a few weeks back, the Book of Life with those names that are recorded in there. And those whose names are not recorded in there, they remain in their sin and they are judged with the authority that God has as the one who loved them enough to die for them, but they have rejected his life and death in their place, so they will be condemned to eternal death as Jesus said in our Gospel today.

So now you and I, when we are confronted with this incredible love that our God has for us, we rejoice in it certainly. But also, let's think about how much more important it is to announce God's judgment to others instead of giving our own. To announce to others the judgment that Jesus has proclaimed on them that he lived and died in their place and took away their sins. Let's proclaim that Gospel so that they might believe it and be saved and be with us on that Last Day and then forever after Jesus separates the sheep and the goats.

Think of how important it is that we start wearing that white wig to announce God's judgment, not our own. Proclaim the Gospel of full and free forgiveness, because God has given us the authority to do that, and God does give us the opportunity to do that!