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*Your Place in the Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)*  
*11/12/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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C.S. Lewis describes a scene in Shakespeare's play, "King Lear." In the scene, there is a servant whose role is so small that Shakespeare didn't even give him a name. He is simply "First Servant." All the characters around him, Cornwall, Regan, and Edmund, believe they know where the play is going. The First Servant, however, is not so deluded. He doesn't pretend to know how the play is going to end, but he understands the scene he is in. He knows his part.

In the scene, the First Servant sees his master commit a despicable crime and in a moment he has his sword out to stop the injustice. But then, Regan stabs him from behind and he dies. That is his whole part, only about 8 lines.

This part may not be the most glorious role in the play. But if it were real life, his would be one of the best parts to play. Why? Because he knew his place. He knew his role. The other characters, though more prominent in the play, mistakenly thought they understood where the play was going. They tried to force the play to fit their wishes and whims. But it all ended in tragedy. Things didn't go the way they worked and planned and strained to make it go. First Servant, however, was not worrying about how to bend the future to his will. Instead, he recognized his place, and he did the right thing right now.

Today our God teaches us about the end of the world so that we can be like the First Servant, so that we know our place, and do the right thing right now. Satan deludes us into thinking that we know the whole play, that we know where life is going. We think we understand who the main characters are in the world. The fact is, we do not even know what will happen tomorrow. It is not our place to bend the world to our wishes and whims. Instead, God teaches us so that we might faithfully play the part he has given us, so that we might do the right thing right now instead of agonizing over things that are not in our control. Today, God teaches you: Know Your Place in the Judgment.

There's all kinds of false teachings about the end of the world: millennialism, the rapture, Hitler was the antichrist. We could go on all day. Here, Jesus tells us the simple truth, the same truth that we confess again and again in the creeds: Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. We do not know when he will come, but

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he will certainly come soon. Therefore, we need to be ready right now!

Jesus paints the picture for us: He will come again with all his angels, sit on his glorious throne, and all people everywhere and everywhen will be gathered before Jesus' throne. On that day, it will be blatantly obvious who is going to heaven and who is going to hell. In life right now, it's not always so clear, is it? The greatest of saints are still corrupted sinners. And the most vile of sinners are still clothed in Jesus' holiness by God's grace. We can judge people by their words and actions but we cannot know their hearts. Only God can.

But on the Last Day, the difference will be obvious. If a shepherd has to separate sheep from goats every night, he's probably going to become very good at telling the difference, right? On Judgment Day, it will be obvious to all.

So, which are you? Are you a sheep or a goat? A believer or an unbeliever? Is your destination eternal life or eternal punishment? Well, let's look at Jesus' words. Jesus explains the difference: the sheep, the believers, are those who trusted in God. The goats, the unbelievers, are those who trusted in their own works.

What does Jesus say to those who are blessed? He says, "Take your inheritance." What do you do to inherit something? Nothing, right? Generally, you simply have a relationship with someone and when they die, they leave you an inheritance. God makes us his sheep, his blessed believers, by bringing us into a relationship with himself through Jesus. This is pure grace from our God.

Jesus even says that the kingdom was prepared for you before the world even began! God has done everything for our salvation so that you and I can be sure that we truly are saved. We will be blessed on Judgment Day! We know this because God planned our salvation before he even created the world! He sent his Son Jesus to pay the full debt of our sins. He sent Jesus to live a holy life as our substitute. He planned history so that, through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit would work faith in your heart to receive the holiness and forgiveness that Jesus' life and death earned for you. He is still guiding your life so that you will end your race standing firm in the faith. Believe that. Build your life on that fact. That is Your Place in the Judgment.

Notice how that changes our lives right now. You may be going through

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impossible situations. You may be suffering worse than ever before. You may feel like your life isn't amounting to much. But you know, from God's Word, that you will be blessed on Judgment Day. You will go to eternal life! Doesn't that put our present sufferings in perspective? A billion years from now, when you are in bliss with your God, what will your sufferings now even mean? Honestly, you'll probably forget you even had them.

So, we know our place eternally, but what about our place right now? Jesus teaches us about that too. He points to the evidences of our faith. What are those evidences? Simply loving people in need. A lot of Christians beat themselves up because they couldn't stop a tragedy in someone else's life, or because they wish they had done this or that better, or because they had some arbitrary view of who they want to be and they aren't that. A lot of times we get to those places because Satan has deluded us into thinking we know the play, that we know the main characters, that we have any clue where this is all going. The truth is: God hasn't told us all those things.

Instead, God calls us to simply recognize the situation we are in. As Christians, we aren't called to change the world. We are called simply to love God above all else and love our fellow human beings as ourselves. As we simply love those in need, God's purposes for our lives are fulfilled. We complete the task before us. We fulfill our role in the play that God is directing. And maybe we don't do a whole lot. Maybe our part is no longer than the First Servant's part. But only God knows the full play. Only God knows the main characters and the minor ones. We are called simply to love as God has loved us.

The things Jesus lists here are not a check-list for salvation. Notice, both the believers and unbelievers react in the same way when Jesus points to the fruits of faith in their lives. They both say, "When did we do that?" "When did we not do that?" The believers didn't even notice that they had done these good works. The unbelievers didn't know they had failed to do them. Why? Because our focus is not on earning salvation. The focus is simply playing the role God has given us: doing the right thing right now, loving God and loving others.

Jesus even gives us a whole new way to look at those around us. He says, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Jesus wants us to see him in the people around us. How would you treat

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people differently if you saw Jesus in their faces? That would be a big change, wouldn't it?

How would you treat that guy who wronged you if you saw Jesus in his face? How would you treat your loved one who has made a huge mistake if you saw Jesus instead? How would you treat that stranger sitting all by themselves if you recognized Jesus sitting there? How would you treat that poor person if you saw Jesus sitting there in need? Wouldn't you jump at the chance to go and visit that sick person if it was Jesus himself who needed someone to just be there with them? That dramatically changes the situation, doesn't it? This is how we know our place. We love God who has loved us more than we could imagine and blessed us with the eternal inheritance of life forever in heaven. And we love our neighbor as if they themselves were our opportunity to say, "thank you" to Jesus himself.

The First Servant didn't have a very big part in his play, but he knew his place. He did the right thing right now. You and I don't know our part in God's plan. So let's not beat ourselves up for things God hasn't given us to do. Instead, know Your Place in the Judgment. You are blessed by our Heavenly Father. You will inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the creation of the world. Believe that. Build your life on that. And let that teach you your place right now. You are not called to understand the full play. You are called to build your life on God's Word, to love God and love your neighbor, to provide for those in need, to see Jesus in the hurting eyes of those in your life. Know Your Place in the Judgment and God will lead you to do the right thing right now. Amen.