

When He Returns

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we've taken that last section of Matthew 25 and it's really a summary of there's a number of parables that are in the earlier part of that chapter and in the last part of chapter 24 but they're all on the same theme. Well the parables particular is speaking about being ready and then this last story it's not a parable about the final judgment is just Jesus speaking forward into his return. Now if you were to take a look around you today into your own world or into the world in which we live you'd recognize and we'd all recognize that everything actually everything points to judgment. There's judgment everywhere around us and it's a very unpopular concept in many ways but it's absolutely central to our lives. If you mentioned God as judge or judgment day and God is judge on that day that many people might sneer and mock at that but we by doing so we are we're taking the place of judgment ourselves in a sense aren't we we're declaring the verdict and some we like declaring the verdict don't we especially on others we're not so keen in it on coming back to ourselves or on our terms we'd rather on our terms but as we look around us today as and as you look around you today I think there's two questions that bleed from our

DNA every single day that are on the theme of judgment and the first one is am I good enough that you might not think you asked that question but I guarantee subconsciously you're asking that question a hundred times a day am I good enough am I good enough the whole world in which we live is soaked in that whole idea of judgment and being good enough you know did I meet do I meet my parents standards am I beautiful enough does my boss think of me as a good worker enough the whole of the identity politics of the world in which we live is about belonging do I believe the right things and can I be part of that am I good enough to be part of that group accepted liked am I worth it the morality of the world in which we live the elections that are about to happen in America it's all going to be based on on whether one of them is good enough to be the president is it not the eating disorders the mental health issues the self-image the addictions what is it about it's about not being good enough for many people and we live in that world which judges very harshly these things and sometimes we judge ourselves very harshly but I guarantee that every day you're trying to you're seeking to justify your existence in this world am I good enough for this world so that may be one one area in which judgment is very real but the another area in which judgment is real is the question of when we ask the question why when you're asking that question why is something happening you're implicitly looking for an answer you're expecting that there's accountability for everything that happens when we cry for justice when we see the brutality and the evil around us we want there to be a judgment for that don't we we want people to be held to account for wrongdoing maybe our lives sometimes are very sheltered and we don't see that but it was interesting I was reading something about someone who'd come out of Shabranica and the desperate brutality and ethnic cleansing that happened there and this

Christian was saying these people who came out of that they're desperate for a judgment day you know in the in the casual realities of our lives sometimes we don't think of that but those who have gone through abject brutality are crying out for justice maybe sometimes it's in the inequality maybe if it's a child of ours is raped maybe if it's in illness if there is no judgment day there is despair is there not despair for us there's no ultimate standard there's no fairness judgment day gives us hope we need a judgment day you need a judgment day and I need a judgment day we need to think through that whole challenge for our lives the shadow of accountability is everywhere around us and its reality is declared here by Jesus so what Jesus is saying here is the truth that underpins the the shadows of judgment that we see all around us every day so what what are we to contend with here in the claims of Jesus and what he says in this last section of his of this teachings this teaching section that

Matthew writes well really we're reminded that this is his fair well address as it were this is the last public address that Jesus gives to his disciples into the crowds now Samuel Johnston was a poet and a writer in the 18th century in England and he said at one to very famous quote he said dependent it sir when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight it concentrates his mind wonderfully and Jesus mind is concentrated wonderfully here he's about to be crucified and days ahead he sees clearly he has only days to live and the important he chooses this because it's such an important message you know if you only a days to live what would you say he would say important things wouldn't you see things that mattered things that were significant and Jesus is doing that he's wanting us to make sense of the shadows as he descends towards them you know he's surrounded by people who think they're gonna judge him they're gonna send him to a cross he's gonna be nailed to a tree he's gonna face judgment day himself and he's saying you think judgment belongs to you he's saying you think you're crucifying me in your own strength and power he's saying here to his the crowds to the disciples and to us judgment belongs to me I own it and before me you will stand even though you push me to a cross I go there willingly by my own foreknowledge and deliberate plan and you will stand before me and it's a powerful message and a significant message he speaks so we we we contend with that we also contend with what he says here and he says he is the king of glory he's the king of glory verse 31 he says when the Son of man comes in his glory with all his angels with him then he will sit in his glorious throne and then in verse 34 he goes on to say then the king will say to those on his right come you who are blessed by my father he see if you're God or if my God is a storybook character or if he's just your imaginary friend then you might nervously kind of laugh off this concept of

Jesus is the king of kings or the king of glory or you may dismiss it and forget his self-revelation here he is the king of glory he has sovereign glory this Jesus is the Son of God who is eternal and infinite he's the uncreated creator he's the source of all life he's the personal first cause holy and pure all seeing all knowing God just and try in self-existing divine community in whose image we are created to love and enjoy to whom we will give account this is the king of glory God the Son and there's a great weight of glory connected with him that's really what glory means it means weightiness it means significance and he is hugely significant and he is the one as he speaks here that we are reminded as you sit in your seats this morning and as those at home watch to whom we owe every single atom of our being our breath today our heartbeat our memories the imagination we have the hope for the future every beautiful experience every lovely meal the joy and the laughter the kind words that someone spoke to us climbing mountains and seeing the glory of God's creation the homes that you were born into the gifts the love the creativity that you have a warm bath a refreshing shower the first smile of a newborn a soft mattress a good joke laughter goodness love we owe him everything every single glorious experience that is part of our lives every breath that allowed you get out of your bed this morning and walk to church or take the car to church everything above all we owe him our worship and our love recognizing his glory but that exposes doesn't it also the depth of our guilt and the culpability of sin when we don't see his generosity when we've when people fail and we've all been there and we all still do this we fail to worship him as the giver when we are thankless when we don't reciprocate his love where we take it all for granted when we live and we use and abuse his gifts and shut him out when we become his judge you see that's what we so often do we become God's judge we blame

[10 : 32] God we proudly sit on the throne of our lives we don't want him to be king we love his gifts but we don't want him to be king and people and sin is the rejection of him it's the it's the curse that comes it's the judgment that God lays on humanity you and me naturally for turning against his holiness and his justice and his love leaves us condemned every human being that ever lived condemned spiritually dead never good enough for God never nobody has ever been good enough for God because of sin the floodgates of of pride and evil infect and affect and spoil everything so some people are listening now and they're saying ah there we go there's the harsh God being spoken of the harsh God of judgment surely he's not going to be like that for me I try my best I do my hardest I'm surely I'm good enough that's a bleak free church Protestant

Calvinist message you're bringing out there isn't that easier to think that and yet lest we forget lest we forget this king of glory that's spoken of here Jesus says is also the Son of Man when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him it's a beautiful designation a powerful biblical designation of Jesus the incarnate son God the Son and that reminder to us is in the context of judgment and in the context of our condemnation humanity's condemnation he says I'll become condemned I'll become one of you I'll be good enough for God in your place so that you can stand I'll take your failure and your condemnation and the curse and the rejection that you have rejected God with and all that you take for granted and I'll pay the infinite cost

I'm the Son of Man I will walk with you I will live like you yet without sin I'll live the life you can't live and yet I'll pay the consequence of death and hell on the cross I'll become the accursed one you know that says the Bibles from the beginning says that cursed accursed is anyone who hangs on a tree pointing forward to what the Son of Man God the Son was to do it's the deepest it's the most unfathomable mysterious act that has ever been recorded in history but it gives us our way back to God our identity our purpose so that we can anticipate the judgment day and not dread the judgment day we'll either do one or two of these two we're either going to dread that day or we're going to anticipate it with a huge degree of humility but we have to let that truth sink in as believers today for Christians here today we have to let that truth sink in that Jesus is good enough he was good enough for God in our place and he paid the price for us not being for every believer in other words what I'm saying as we come to a passage like this judgment day has passed it's already been it happened on the cross judgment day has already happened that's a hugely significant and important truth for us to consider what a way is taken off you know have you ever have you ever thought of what condemned man ever spoke the words of verse 31 of Matthew 25 what condemned man going to the crucifixion and going to his death could say when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him then he will sit on his glorious throne that's an astonishing statement for someone who is penniless who is friendless who is about to be betrayed and to be nailed to a cross Son of Man the same Son of Man is coming back the same Jesus is coming back not as a servant not in his humiliated state he's coming back as the shepherd king he's coming back in his glory not to announce a judgment day but to confirm to declare a settled verdict that is already known in the eternal future of you and me and every single human being the Creator in love because he himself became judged became condemned has a double justification to be on the throne on that day and we remember that it's momentous as he goes to the crucifixion it's not unplanned it's infinitely relevant for all of history his everything that we face is heading towards that day where we will stand before a judge with nail pierced hands and feet remember that we stand but we will stand before a judge with nail pierced hands and feet and as we have entrusted our lives to him and you know our lives and some of you might not think this in your youth but our lives are passing faster than a weaver shuttle we needn't fear that day if we have taken him as our Savior and recognize his nail pierced hands and feet on our behalf so he's us we've seen that he is the King of glories the Son of man he's the same Jesus who's coming back but he speaks about the fact that

there'll be a permanent separation before him verse 32 will be gathered all the nations everyone everyone and he will separate people one from another as a set as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats sheep from goats there's no intrinsic difference between the two in that passage not that sheep are good and goats are bad it just said they were separated by the shepherd and in that culture at night because they needed different things get right and left there's a clear separation righteous and wicked that's what he says those who are righteous and he says that in verse 37 then the righteous will answer him Lord and so on when did we see you hungry so there's a there's a there's a separation there's a difference but we saw that in Sam one didn't we no one's righteous nobody nobody nobody can stand before God nobody can be approved by God isn't that right who's it speaking of then if no one can stand then it's speaking of those who are covered in the righteousness of another the righteousness of

Jesus those who have recognized their guilt and entrusted their judgment on Jesus Christ whose judgment day has already been and who received the gift of his life and his righteousness so there is a separation between those who believe and those who have not considered and trusted in Jesus and on what is that on what is that judgment based other than on that pure fact of trusting in Jesus well it's very interesting nearly all the way through the Bible judgment is spoken of by God in terms of works now it's not that works it's not that we do things and that saves us but what God is or Jesus emphasizing is said if we if we've been changed by grace if we have a transformed heart then it will show itself in our life and in the works of our life you know faith without works is dead and so often in the Bible the basis of judgment that God gives is on the basis of what evidence there is of a changed heart we're changed from the inside out and that's exactly what

[19 : 04] Jesus is saying here he's saying our value system as Christians changes and there should be evidence of that on that great day of judgment now I think it means both that we recognize a spiritual poverty but we are also compassionate and generous in recognizing a material poverty and loss in the world around us because you know what does he say the king says he welcomes the blessed that was father into this inheritance and he says for I was hungry and he gave me food I was thirsty he gave me drink I was a stranger welcome me I was naked you clothed me I was sick and you visit me I was in prison you came to me and the righteous say well when did we do when did we do that and he said when you did it for the least of your fellow Christians you did it for me and so he's saying now I want to get this right it's really important that it's very difficult in some ways he's saying when we are Christians we have seen what we were like before God and we could take these things spiritually in other words that we were people before God who were starving spiritually unsatisfied estranged outside broken sick enslaved we were we were we were all these poverty-stricken realities spiritually and we recognize that we are hopeless despairing without Jesus but that Jesus came and he gives us identity and belonging and nourishment and an inheritance and a hope and when we see that when we know who we are before God spiritually it changes how we look at one another physically and how we treat one another as Christians seeing no in

Christ changes everything so we look with Christ's eyes both at one another spiritually as being needy but being fed in Christ but also can I say materially and socially that we have a different value system maybe we don't judge people by the same standards as the world but rather we look out to everyone with compassion and with love and with help especially those who are poorest can I say materially there is a clear material emphasis here that we're not just pals together but that we care for and look out for and are interested in the most vulnerable and the most needy and spiritually the most maybe unpromising of people as we would to judge them so instinctively as Christians we should become non-judgmental because God is judge isn't it it's not about discernment this is about judging others and rejecting them oh they're no use oh there's no much potential in them other useless Christians they always fall away this it's not like that we're not to be like that we're instinctively generous and outgoing and our attitudes to others because of what we've received and we're we help those who need help you know Jesus talks about the cup of cold water and you know the great act of of this is that it's so it's so instinctive that we don't even realize we're doing it because they say in that day Lord when did we do that and Jesus says well when you did it for the least of your brethren you did it for me so there's no hierarchy within the Christian community there's no great super duper spiritual Superman Christians ordinary

Christians rubbish Christians it's not like that not from our eyes anyway when we see who we are like Paul could say I'm the worst of all sinners I was the worst of all sinners we can say that because we know our own hearts therefore we don't spend our lives judging and going on the throne and judging and condemning others so that gospel community what Jesus is saying is that we value who we might regard humanly speaking as the the least of all believers the most unpromising of all believers maybe the the most struggling Christian not just spiritually but even maybe materially and we are kind to all why is that because when we are kind to them Jesus says we are actually being kind to Jesus now that gives the most insignificant apparently and the most someone who thinks that the least gifted and the least talented believer in the world great dignity and value because when someone does something nice from a

Christ-centered point of view for them Christ regards it as done for himself so you as a Christian that gives you and me a great self-worth because when people do kind and Christian acts towards us in our need Jesus thinks it's been done to himself so the gospel community is highlighted in the attitudes that is spoken of here but those on his left will be rejected on that day because they reject Jesus Christ and his gospel they reject that sense of need and that sense of emptiness and that nakedness and that hunger and that rejection they they don't accept that God rejects them they don't accept that they're condemned they don't accept their need but they will recognize him as Lord on that day Lord even those who are on the left will say when did we see you like this and he says when you didn't do it for one of the least of my brothers you didn't do it for me so there was a rejection of Christ and his community and his kingdom and his work and whatever they did they didn't do it for Jesus Christ that's very challenging hugely challenging so how do we react tonight with this I finish well for me it strikes great fear and a cry of faith in my own heart I believe but I can't grasp it I can't grasp the awfulness of eternal damnation I can't even grasp the beauty of eternal life but I believe it because it comes from the lips of Jesus the Son of Man the King of glory and the cross and the work of salvation I pray for deeper trust and deeper wisdom and more humble faith to recognize my heart and therefore my attitude to others and how my heart needs transformed by this truth I think it helps me reflect and I hope it helps you reflect on the shadows of every day you may be struggle with identity and with not being good enough you may see around you all the need for accountability and justice you may see injustice you may think about the law may think about death and what it means look at it in the light of the reality of Jesus and his uniqueness as judge who himself was judged for you so that judgment day has passed it does make you it certainly makes me reflect on the strange beauty of the cross that judgment is already meted out the death is already been defeated that Satan is already condemned and lost and is awaiting his final destruction it's not about being good enough is it it's about

Jesus being good enough in our place and being covered in his righteousness and the worth that we have from that the self-worth the importance that when anyone does anything to us in the name of Jesus Jesus feels that as if it's done to himself so it's that great reality and paradox isn't it the honesty of confessing that we are more wicked than we ever dared to believe and yet we're more loved and accepted than Jesus and we ever dared hoped it ever dared hope and so it leaves us all with a solemn choice doesn't it always the Bible never allows us not to make that choice if we reject Jesus in our lives now then one day whoever it is we will face him again as judge we will we all everyone will face him every knee will bow every tongue will confess everyone will say on that day Lord Lord whatever their unbelief now whatever their security of atheistic thinking is now everyone will face Jesus and it does speak about the seriousness of sin that the only way it could be dealt with with God the Son going to the cross and going to the pit of hell on our behalf so we can deal with that unbelief now as we come and pray and cry out to the living God knowing him as Savior here and now that judgment day is passed isn't that great for me for you if you're a Christian judgment days past God is just you'll never punish again he's passed he's punished his own son in our place and these the previous four parables that we didn't read there's a lot of reading in it the end of chapter 23 and most of chapter 25 these are all parables that speak about the need to be ready now living now in the readiness of the return of Jesus whether it's you would be prepared if a thief if you knew when a thief was coming to rob your house whether you knew the servant was the master was coming back and you would act wisely the servant the five bridesmaids would be ready for the groom coming if they expected this coming they were wise and so being prepared or the irresponsible servant who just didn't care about the gifts and talents he'd been given and just blame God for it or blamed his master for being unfair all of them in their own cultural significant way of the day we're speaking about Jesus coming back and being ready for that and and that he still wants us to be ready there's things in these passages that I don't fully understand but the clear simple messages look into your heart today and see how your life reflects your understanding of your relationship before the living God in mind and how grace is changing us to be more like him every day in generosity and in compassion to the people around about us just as it was with Jesus and I wish I had more time to speak about the church's response to poverty and the reality that we should be making a difference in COVID as a people all the time because of what we are and who we are we shouldn't be in our lives insular or overly protective we should care and love and reach out to those in need all the time both in the church and out with the church amen I'll finish with the fifth prayer that the church is praying today Lord God we ask and pray that your spirit would bless the preaching of your

[31 : 24] gospel which is good news it's not kind of spiritual and not caring about material reality or not caring about illness or not caring about pandemic but we know that the ultimate answer to our need is spiritual because they're in his healing and they're in his hope and they then we look to a day when Jesus was lush that's into his new heavens and new earth where there will be no pandemic and no illness and no sin and no death and no separation and no tears and no funerals and no grief but only perfection and joy beyond our imagination beyond what we could even if we were the brainiest cleverest most able to understand everything in the universe beyond even that is what we have to hope and look forward to so we trust you we ask you deep in our trust and deep in our humility and deep in our understanding of grace today amen