

Last Judgment. Nov 8, 2020.

Intro to Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14. Look back in time before you were born. Stretch your view back further than a generation or two or three, beyond the times when your grandparents or great grandparents lived. Go back even all the way to creation, and before that. That's where we begin today. That's where God's Word takes you: to catch a glimpse of the grand perspective of time. And this sets the stage as we are brought to the main truth today of the Last Judgment, a day still to come, and the outcome for us.

Why is going back in time so far like this an important part of our encouragement *as we look forward* to the Last Judgment? A couple of important truths stand out today as answers here.

There is no mistaking: the scene here in Daniel ch.7 (vs.9 and following) is the Last Day. And at the center of the scene, in command, is "*The Ancient of Days*."

What does that name and description tell you?

A few lines, which I remember all the way back from a high school English class, draw out a contrast.

"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances..." – William Shakespeare

Kings and rulers on the stage of world history come and go. None last. Amidst the transitory shuffling of mortal, human authorities who sit upon their seats of power for a blip of history and then are bumped, THIS ONE – "*the Ancient of Days*" – remains and reigns with unchanging permanency. The One who was, and who is, *and who is to come* - who will reign forever. So...

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. – Psalm 146:3

In Daniel ch.7 there are 10,000 times 10,000 attendants before the throne of the Ancient of Days. You've maybe seen a stadium full of 100,000 standing and screaming fans. Maybe you've seen pictures of crowds on the Washington DC mall numbering up towards or beyond a million. This vision presents us with 100 million warrior-servants standing in honor of the One, Enduring King. "All rise. The court is in session." This is the final judgment.

In the spectacular scene, our eyes flash around to pick up:

- Thrones set in place.
- Wheels with the Ancient of Day's throne. The imagery is probably tied to that of a war chariot. Justice was often executed right on the battlefield, immediately following the victor's triumph. Isaiah, back just a little earlier in the Old Testament, uses the same picture (66:15). And...
- Books were opened. Courts, of course, have their books. The evidence is entered there.

What are the books going to reveal at the Last Judgment?

Well, if you or I are left to stand judgment based on our own record, we'd have no chance. Divine justice would call for a separation from God forever. Because that's what sin does – it separates from our holy God. This we know from Scripture.

But look closely at this chapter in Daniel and you see: there is a witness with evidence to show another record as a basis for judgment. He is "a son of man," yet – the same one – is also ruling and reigning eternally, over all. Who is this?

Jesus, God the Son, who came to earth once – who lived and died for us. He is present on the Last Day. And this brings comfort for all who trust in Him, because we know from the rest of the Bible: what happens at the Last Judgment for us will be based on what happened to Him when He came the first time.

More detail of this is coming in our next Bible lesson. For this moment at hearing Daniel ch.7...

Be assured that the One you see here is the one to trust in - and only Him - as the source of a right record in the End before God. Trust in His life lived for you and His suffering for sin in your place.

Read Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

⁹ I continued to watch until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days was seated. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair on his head was like pure wool. His throne was flames of fire. Its wheels were blazing fire. ¹⁰ A river of fire flowed out from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and books were opened. ... ¹³ I kept watching the night visions,

and there, in the clouds of heaven, I saw one like a son of man coming. He came to the Ancient of Days, and he was brought before him. ¹⁴ To him was given dominion, honor, and a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages will worship him. His dominion is an eternal dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

Prayer – O Lord, may all that you are, all that you have done for us and our salvation, occupy the front of each of our minds and lives until you come for us. Amen.

Intro to Matthew 25:31-46. It's easy to match up the scene from Daniel as the same one Jesus describes here. The "Son of Man" from Daniel, Jesus describes coming with all His angels. Daniel recorded that 10,000 times 10,000 attendants were around the throne. Revelation uses that same "10,000 times 10,000" description for the angels around God's throne (see Revelation 5:11 also). And Jesus, the Son of Man, is on the throne. All people are gathered. And the last judgment is rendered.

And we said earlier that we'd return to look closer at this: What is the basis for the outcome / verdict? For you? For me? Listen for it...

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. 36 I was lacking clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or lacking clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 "The King will answer them, 'Amen I tell you: Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you did not give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you did not give me anything to drink. 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, lacking clothes and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not take care of me.' 44 "Then they will also answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or lacking clothes or sick or in prison and did not serve you?' 45 "At that time he will answer them, 'Amen I tell you: Just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.' 46 And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

A lot of what I'll be sharing now is from a devotion that highlights this next thought (by Pastor Daniel Deutschlander, On Giving Advice To God, Part 2 pg.218-225).

Look at Jesus' words to the first group in Matthew 25:31-46, words to those who believe in Jesus. The verdict is rendered *before* there is any mention of our lives. What do we learn from that? Our lives, our deeds, aren't at all a part of the basis of this verdict / outcome of eternal life with our God.

What is the basis then?

"Jesus calls this group 'blessed by my Father.' That's how we come to enter heaven... It's all God's doing ... not at all our own. He makes the point doubly clear when he adds, 'Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' Before you had believed anything, before you (could have) done anything, before you were even born, even before the world was created, God had prepared for your entry into heaven."

"Always then may this be the first thing on our mind at the beginning of our day and at day's end if Jesus has not returned: My fitness to enter heaven is not based on my choice in time but on God's choice in eternity; my readiness to face him in the great judgment is not based on my works in time but on Jesus' work on the cross; my confidence in the outcome of that judgment has its firm foundation not on my still so flawed and feeble life and feelings but on his sure and certain promises in the Word and sacraments."

"The verdict of 'Declared not guilty! Forgiven!' is the result of grace, the work of Jesus in earning that verdict for us."

Only after that verdict is there mention of anything from our life.

And just look – there is mention by Jesus of deeds that hold to His Word where love like His shows up in our lives.

Well, if our deeds are being mentioned, why is there no mention of our sins?

“...what about all the sins, all the struggles lost? ... Why doesn't Jesus weigh that (mention that) at the Last Day?”

“Well, just think of it for a minute. What was the whole point of his coming down from heaven, the whole point of his cross and passion? It was to take away the sin of the world. It was to wash us clean. Where, then, are the stains and imperfections that were in even the best of our works? Where is all of that? It's all gone! It was forgiven. It was paid for. So Jesus sees no need in the last judgment to bring it up! What he brings up is what remained after the fault was pardoned and the imperfection was covered with his grace and forgiveness.”

So it's clear there's no reason for us to boast about our deeds. But the mention of them does have an important application: “there's no reason for the greatest or the least among us to imagine that their life is a waste and of no worth to Jesus or anyone else.”

- Parents who bring their children to baptism and teach their children the Word of God
- Children who reflect their love of Jesus in their words and actions to their parents and others
- Each of us reflecting the love of Jesus in opportunities to offer kindness or respect or service to others in our lives

Are these done perfectly? No. Are they done to earn anything from God? No. That's already been covered. That only comes from Jesus. But when done in response to Jesus' love, they are treasured by Jesus.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus, help us see our lives in the light of your Word. For only then will life make sense for each of us. Only then will we have true and lasting joy. Give us joy here and now in the opportunities you give us both to hear your Word and to live in service out of love for all of your underserved love and mercy for us. Amen.

Intro to 1 Thes. 5:1-11.

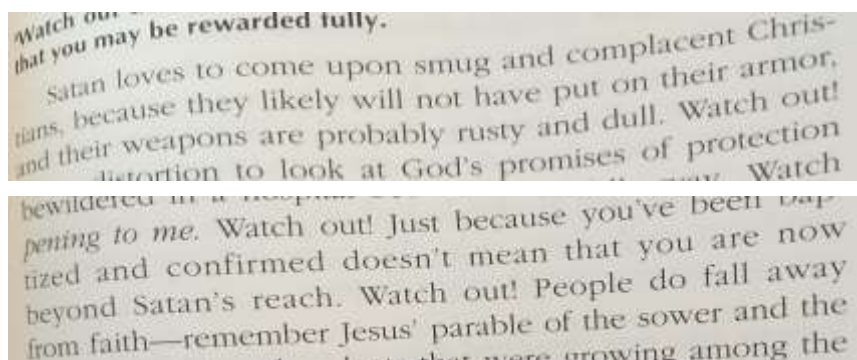
Two outcomes are again described. For one group of people there will be no escape then. The torment originally intended only for the devil and the other fallen angels – tragically, many people will end up there. It should make us shudder to think of it! But God is not to blame. It's only their rejection of God's truth, rejection of Jesus, leaving them with only their own record to be judged upon.

But that's not the case for you who are awake and in the light. “Awake” and “in the light” describe all in whom faith in Jesus has been created – where faith in Jesus lives.

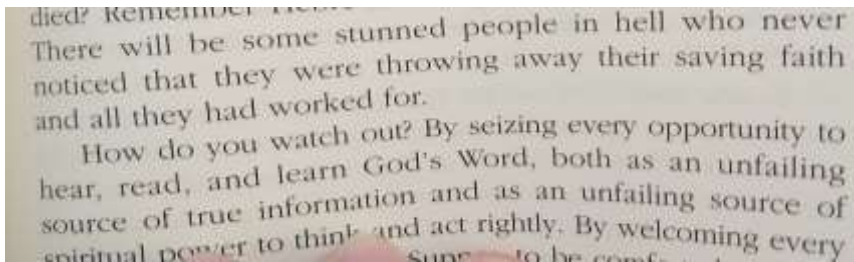
Stay awake.

Jesus warned about false teachers and false teachings multiplying. He warned about the love of most growing cold. He described the times getting worse and worse before His return comes. In that light, is there ever a time for getting lazy spiritually?

A little clip was passed on to me recently. It read: (from the People's Bible on the General Epistles)



“Remain alert! Stay awake!” How critical is this call to action? How much attention should you be devoting to this matter?? The clip went on to make this point:



We're up against Satan, and the other fallen angels – the demons. They utilize whatever resources they can. They are without mercy in their mission. They want to tempt us away from our faith in Jesus, where we stand safe. This spiritual battle is raging at all times.

They want to divert our attention away from the eternal, away from Jesus' return.

How can we keep from falling into spiritual sleep, from drowsiness and loss of our spiritual senses? How can we keep from letting down our guard?

How? God-given armor is provided through His Word and sacraments. God provides us with strength in the spiritual battle:

faith and knowledge of his self-sacrificing love a breastplate, and the hope of salvation a helmet.

Seize every opportunity to hear, read and learn God's Word. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can...

- “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” 2 Cor. 10:4-5

Read 1 Thes. 5:1-11

Concerning the times and dates, brothers, there is no need to write to you, 2 for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When people are saying, “Peace and security,” destruction will suddenly come on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape. 4 But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day takes you by surprise like a thief, 5 for you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep like everyone else, but rather let us remain alert and sober. 7 To be sure, those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 You see, God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are also doing.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, this life seems so long when, in reality, it lasts but a moment. Heaven and hell last forever! Help us keep that in mind as we sort out the priorities we set in life. By your presence and work in your Word and sacraments, move each of us to consider nothing more important in life than your saving truth. Hear us, as we pray, as we wait and prepare with longing and with joy for your return. Amen.