

***“ You did-did-did but You didn’t-didn’t-didn’t ”*** (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Mat 25:31-46)

\* *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory,* (Mat 25:31). Friends, on hearing this foreword it might bring the imminent Advent of the King Jesus Christ into your focus. In fact, the King has been believed and worshiped among all nations for two millenniums and none of the good or bad deeds of Jesus’ worshipers are forgotten or neglected. As it was in the beginning, God’s Word continues to challenge us to believe unbelievable things and put them in practice. God’s work in and through us has not been finished yet. “ ... the messengers *went out and made proclamation everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming their message by the signs which accompanied it.* (Mar 16:20). But our proclamation will be terminated with Jesus Christ’s return bodily to judge the living and the dead, (Acts 1:11; Rev 20:12). Could you believe?, there will no more opportunity to repent and be baptized.

\* Taking advantage of every opportunity, we ponder over the reading from (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24). Even this text is composed of the eleven verses, yet it includes 23 usages of God’s personal pronouns - “ I”! The repetition of God’s name “I AM WHO I AM,” 23 times about the One who will always be the Ruler of his people, 23 times about the One who has always been their King, should produce in us the firm sense of God’s concern about the deeds of the living and the dead. From Ezekiel it is clear that nothing that had happened with Israel and other nations happened by itself, but with God’s purpose. *“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out;” “ Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.”* (v. 11, 20). From the time of that prophecy up to now many things have passed, but there are still a number of things ahead that must be fulfilled. In conformity with what was said, we wish to center on who God is, how adequate He is, as well as center on our calling and responsibility.

\* Today we continue the theme of the last Sunday - *The coming of the King as a Judge.* When theologians discuss the mysterious vocation of the incarnate Son of God, they appeal to Christ’s threefold office – the prophetic, priesthood, and kingship. While this paradigm doesn’t represent Christ as a Judge, this office is still here, that is to say the kingship comprises with this office. It is a very scriptural as well as natural to speak of the possession of the judging power with the office of reigning. For example, (2 Sam 8:15) says that King David reigned over all Israel, yet he administered judgment and justice to his people, as much as his son Solomon did. Next, in the accepted sense of the theistic world the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, *“... Praise the Lord your God, ..., he has made you king so you can rule with justice and righteousness,”* (1 Kings 10:9). Therefore, apart from the shepherding of the office of the king,

it also possesses the power of executing judgment and justice. Besides, the gospel reading of this day (Matt 25:31-46) is found to be important on this matter.

\* Our text is the third of three parables recorded by Matthew in 25<sup>th</sup> chapter: of the Ten Virgins, of the Three Servants, and of the Final Judgment. Aside from this text, the scene of *the Final Judgment* is also seen in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Revelation. It is good to read both texts as supplementary to one another.

The parable and the Revelation develop the imagery of a crowd without number that was assembled before the judgment seat of Christ without any chance to escape. Looking at Matthew, the text speaks of people's characters, ones like sheep and others like goats. As usual sheep lean on their shepherd and obey his voice, so some people accept Jesus to be their Ruler and they please him through all their life. On the contrary, the goats despise the voice of their shepherd and cohabite with their wild desires. Such character is appropriate to the people who refused Jesus as their Lord and Savior; they walk after their sinful desires against God's commandments.

\* At last the time of separation is at hand. Imagine that the Judge is already sitting on his glorious throne and all nations whom the Savior has been proclaimed are summoned before the judgment seat of God, (Rom 14:10). But on what principles will all nations be judged? The parable says - on the principal of the acceptance of the least of Jesus' brothers, (v. 40). And have the nations received Jesus' brothers? The record of people's deeds on this matter is kept on until the end, said the apostle, (Rev 20:12).

\* The history of Christianity has known a great number of acceptances as well as rejections. For example, we've learned that the pagan Scandinavians were hostile towards missionaries and pastors in the beginning. Due to their passions, it says that they might be worse than beasts. In their energy, they were sometimes fiercer than demons. They liked to destroy for the sake of destruction, and they were very cruel towards their enemy. However, most of them were faithful in marriages and were ready to sacrifice for the sake of their friends, king, or members of their family. It was quite natural for pagan Scandinavians to slay the missionaries, and burn Christian schools and churches. But after a contest of more than a century, it became apparent that Christianity would be victorious in Scandinavia because some people, despite their pagan hostility and brutality welcomed Jesus' messengers on hearing the Gospel. Those became Christians, to them belong the Kingdom and its blessings, "*Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,*" (v. 34). But Scandinavians who rejected the gospel, left the country as if they were flying from some awful plague, the King Jesus will address words of condemnation due to their violence and rejection, "*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,*" (v.41).

\* People should know that their destiny depends on how they believe in Jesus Christ, truly or falsely. According to the synoptic gospels, before sending the twelve to proclaim the kingdom, Jesus instructed them to take nothing, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics, (Luk 9:3). So the apostles (messengers) learned that Jesus is the true Son of God, and he is the good Shepherd who gave his life for his friends. When the messengers showed up in villages, they seemed to be vulnerable and dependable people. They didn't have a staff to protect themselves from robbers; they didn't even have bags because they had nothing to put in them, *no bread, no money*, (v. 3). That is why in our parable Jesus calls his messengers "*the least my brothers*." They went and proclaimed Jesus the Savior of the world. Yet, they were fully protected and nourished because the Lord was with them. Some people believed and they were baptized following the teaching of the apostles. The outcome of people's belief was seen in their brotherly behavior towards Jesus' messengers. In the Day of Judgment those Christians will not be ashamed, but they will rejoice greatly going into eternal life, (v. 46). Contrary, the Scripture says that unrepentant sinners will not inherit eternal life because they rejected Jesus as well as his brothers. Those only pretended but their deeds witness against them. In fact, they didn't share their bread when the brothers were hungry; they didn't clothe them when they were in need; and they were indifferent when Jesus' brothers suffered injustice and even imprisonment. The parable teaches that the outcome of people's unbelief is poison and utterly destructive to their bright future, (v.46).

\* Trying to adjust our discussion to the time we are living now, we wish to briefly mention our brothers, pastors and evangelists, who have received the divine call and are now in service of proclamation. Some of them left their former occupations and businesses for Christ's sake. As soon as their seminary work was finished, the new ministers of the Word were sent to proclaim the way of life and to administer the means of grace to God's people. After all, do you believe that they are Jesus' messengers? Look, they may seem vulnerable; they don't have their own houses, profitable businesses, or are not even protected from ungodly people. The statistics says that 1,600 pastors leave the ministry each month in the US. 90% of pastors said the hardest thing about ministry is dealing with uncooperative people. 70% of pastors feel grossly underpaid. 80% of pastors' wives feel left out and unappreciated by the church members. Yes, to be God's messengers is a tough task, but it is great blessing with crowns in the end.

Brothers, let us love Jesus and those whom he has sent to preach the gospel; not by words only but by deeds as well. If we'll show our faith through ordinary deeds of kindness and mercy to the least Jesus' brothers, we will not be ashamed on the Day of Judgment. But the time is short, Christ's Advent is by a door.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth let him be taught.

Amen.