



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 9 – The Final Judgment**

IX. The Final Judgment

We believe and teach that this world as it now exists will be destroyed. We have no illusions as to the final outcome of events and do not preach false millennialistic hopes. We reject the false teachings that there will be a mass conversion of the Jews and that Christ will return for a thousand-year rule on earth prior to or following a “rapture” of the elect. Rather, turning to and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, we point to the future city of God “...not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). We encourage all to look forward to the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Second Coming to judge the living and the dead. On that day the believers will hear Jesus say, “Come, you blessed of My Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

2 Peter 3:10: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

Mark 16:16: *He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

2 Timothy 3:13: *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

John 18:36: *Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”*

Ephesians 5:6: *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

Matthew 25:31-46 (Christ’s glorious return)

Comments:

There is only one chapter in the whole Bible (Revelation 20) that speaks of a millennium, that is, a period of one thousand years. Since Revelation is made up of visions that use symbolic language, it is clear that this millennium is not to be understood literally as a period of one thousand calendar years. From the context it is clear that the millennium of Revelation 20 comprises the entire period between Jesus’ first coming and His second coming at the end of the world.

Nevertheless, the pages of church history are filled with references to Bible teachers who have explained the millennium according to their own ideas, even though their conclusions are contrary to plain Bible teaching elsewhere. For a long time, a very popular view was *postmillennialism*. According to this view, which held by many before the First World War, the Church of Jesus Christ will become stronger and stronger in the world; many of the worst features of sin will be wiped out, and there will be a long period (not necessarily a literal millennium) of peace and prosperity in the world when Christians will prosper. The Lord tells us that this idea is false in 2 Timothy 3:13: **“But evil men and**

impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” As long as we are in this world, believers in Christ should expect to be treated no better than Jesus Himself. Jesus was hated and persecuted. That is what we can expect from the world as well. World events since 1914 have made postmillennialism very much less popular today.

Currently the prevailing view is called *premillennialism*. According to this view we can expect Christians to suffer in this world and for things to get worse and worse, until the so-called “rapture” occurs. At this “rapture” dead believers will rise from the dead, and living believers will be snatched up with into the sky, or “raptured”, secretly while the rest of the world continues on unaware. Seven years later Jesus will return with all His believers and set up an earthly kingdom at Jerusalem (the millennial rule). Christians will rule the world with Jesus. Some believe that the Temple at Jerusalem will be rebuilt at this time, and the Old Testament sacrificial system will be reinstated. Then after this millennium the final judgment will come. Jesus shows us this view is false when HE said to Pontius Pilate at His trial: **“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here”** (John 18:36).

Many believe that all the Jews, or at least most of the Jews, will be converted to Christianity before the end comes. This seems to be based on a misinterpretation of Romans 11:26: **“And so all Israel will be saved.”** But according to the context **“Israel”** does not refer to the nation of Israel or the Jewish people, but to the **“Israel of God”** (Galatians 6:16), that is, to all the Christians, both Jewish and Gentile.

When we understand the visions of Revelation and Daniel in the light of clear Scripture elsewhere, it becomes clear that Jesus’ second coming will take place at an unknown future time, and that when He comes again, a general resurrection of all the dead will take place – both believers and unbelievers – and all mankind, from all nations and from all time periods, will appear before Jesus, whom God appointed as Judge. At this one and only resurrection Jesus will make a permanent separation, as He taught in Matthew 25. There are only two possible final eternal destinies: what Jesus calls **“eternal life”** and **“everlasting fire”** or **“everlasting punishment”** (Matthew 25:41, 45).

In the period between His resurrection and His ascension Jesus told His disciples: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”** (Mark 16: 15-16). Our final destiny will be determined by our response to the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ. This same teaching is repeated in many passages of Scripture, for it is of greatest importance for sinners to know the only way of salvation. **“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”** (1 John 5: 11-12). On the Last Day it will also be revealed that Jesus’ sheep (believers) will have produced fruits of faith in their lives (Matthew 25).

In our day there are many who believe that in the end everyone, or almost everyone, will go to heaven. In fact, there are many who deny the existence of hell. But Jesus’ words in Matthew 25 are clear. There will be a separation. We should not allow ourselves to be deceived. The apostle Paul wrote: **“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 5:6).

There will be only one physical resurrection from the dead. Jesus said: **“The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation”** (John 5:28-29). This resurrection will take place on the Last Day, as Jesus said: **“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:40). Jesus is clear here that believers will only be raised on the last day, not at some secret resurrection before the last day, as those who teach a “rapture” wrongly believe.

The bodies of believers in Jesus will be instantly changed on that Last Day to make them fit for eternal life, as apostle Paul wrote: **“We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”** (1 Corinthians 15: 51-52).

Another false teaching that is very popular among many today is the idea of reincarnation: the idea that when a person dies, his spirit will enter into another body and he will live again as someone else – perhaps even as an animal. According to this idea a person could have many incarnations and live many different lives. But God’s Word rules out such a teaching: **“It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27).

When we die, or when the Last Day comes, there will be no more opportunities for us to repent of our sins and hear the blessed Gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection that has won eternal life for all. Now is our time of grace – our time to repent and believe the Gospel and live the Christian life. **“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”** (2 Corinthians 6:2).

No one on earth can know when that last day will come and all of these things will happen: Jesus’ return, the resurrection of the dead, the end of the world, and the final judgment. Jesus said: **“Heaven and earth will pass away... But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only”** (Matthew 24:35-36). When that day comes, everyone will become aware of it at once. The end will be unmistakable: **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”** (2 Peter 3:10).

In view of what our Lord has revealed about the future, we ought to stay alert and watchful, for the Last Day may come at any time. By faith in Jesus Christ we have the forgiveness of sins and the sure hope of eternal life with our Lord in heaven. When we face severe crises in our lives on earth, we should look forward to the hope of heaven, and we should say with Paul: **“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18). The closing chapters of the Bible (Revelation 21-22) direct our eyes to the promised **“new heaven and new earth,”** where **“there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying”** (Revelation 21:1, 4). **“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”** (Revelation 22:20).

Questions

1. What is meant by the millennium?
2. What are some faulty views of this millennium?
3. Why can we be sure that this world will not greatly improve before the end?
4. Why can we be sure that Jesus will not reign as an earthly king?
5. What can we say to those who believe that all the Jews will turn to Christ?
6. Why can we be sure that there will be only one resurrection of all the dead?
7. List some of the events that will take place on the Last Day.
8. What are the only two final destinies for human beings?
9. What is the one and only way of salvation?
10. What will happen to those who reject Jesus and His Gospel?
11. What will happen to the believers on the Last Day?
12. Why is it foolish to try to predict when Jesus will come again?
13. Why can we look forward to the second coming of our Lord Jesus?

X. Conclusion

We believe and desire to confess by word and deed before the Triune God and all mankind these truths together with all other truths of Holy Scripture as set forth also in the Lutheran confessional statements as found in the *Book of Concord* (1580 AD).

We earnestly desire to share the rich blessings of Christ and extend a welcome to:

ALL who are in distress of mind and heart because of their guilt and condemnation in the sight of Almighty God and who seek the pardon and comfort that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can give;

ALL who are bewildered by the confusion of many voices offering the theories of human wisdom in the name of religion and who desire to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, Whom God raised from the dead;

ALL who, though members of Christian churches, have come to recognize that their churches have departed from the truth of Holy Scripture and therefore "*ask for the old paths where the good way is...*" (Jeremiah 6:16);

ALL who have strayed from the faith and desire to be restored to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls (cf. 1 Peter 2:25).

***Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen.***

(Jude vv. 24-25)