

CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS, OUR CROWN

The Lord knows who are the righteous -- Christ's crown is the reward of their faith.

Matthew 25:31-40

TEXT: *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

While the world rocks in the wake of recent terrorist attacks, many wring their hands in wondering what to do. Who's next? Geraldo River's own daughter was in that soccer stadium in Paris Friday night when Islamic terrorists began bombing and shooting civilians in six separate attacks throughout the center of the city of Paris. I noticed that Geraldo's countenance and demeanor was much more intense than it is when he normally broadcasts the news of such events. While he often expresses his indignation over the cowardice of Islamic terrorists, this time his eyes watered and his voice quivered over the fear of his daughter's safety. It's one thing when terrorism occurs far away, but it's another when its strike is more personal.

We are not to be surprised at such things, for Jesus has already told us: ***You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.*** Mt 24 Terrorism and brutal warfare have existed since before Noah's flood, and throughout the Old Testament days. Wars and fearful rumors of wars have existed in Jesus' day, and he says that it will continue until he comes on Judgment Day. Jesus says: ***There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.*** Mt 24 My daughter-in-law works for a large investment firm who purposely has located its world headquarters in Phoenix AZ because it's the safest location for its vast computer systems. There are no hurricanes, tornados or earthquakes, until last week when my son and his wife experienced a rather large earthquake. That wasn't supposed to happen any more than they are to be felt in Michigan. Jesus also said: ***Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.*** Mt 24 Conservative news media have been reporting on how there is a war on Christianity by liberal ideologists in our own country. They scream at any sign of Christianity and demand that any display of Christianity be removed from the eyes of the public. And one of the most powerful signs Jesus has given to prepare us for the End of the World is this: ***And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*** Mt 24 While the Lord uses the Gospel to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify the elect, he says that it's also a "testimony" or a sign that proves that the end is near, very near. For with today's technology, there is nowhere in the world where the name of Jesus cannot be heard!

This is for us who wear Christ's Righteousness as our Crown. The Lord knows who are the righteous. Christ's crown is the reward of their faith.

Jesus tells us in his own words exactly what will happen the moment he comes on Judgment Day: ***When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*** There you have it. A swift and certain division based on whether one is a "sheep" or a "goat."

Paul also describes that moment in time with these words: ***According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who***

are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. 1 Th 4 That is Jesus separating the “sheep” from the “goats.” The command of Jesus will probably be like his command when on the Fifth Day of Creation he told the land to produce the animals. At his command, all the creatures on earth came out of the ground. Yes, the chicken did indeed precede the egg! On Judgment Day, all souls ever conceived in the wombs of women, on the face of the earth, from Adam and Eve’s first born Cain, to the last soul to be conceived at that moment, will arise. The dead will rise first, as Jesus says: *Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.* Jn 5 The “good” who rise to live are Jesus’ sheep. The goats who rise to be condemned are those who have done evil.

According to Jesus and Paul, this miraculous resurrection and division into two groups will take place quickly and with the accuracy of God’s almighty power and wisdom. There will be no discussion or argument, for as Paul also writes: *the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.* 1 Th 4

These words of Jesus and Paul can only be encouraging in these Last Days if we know where we stand. Will we wear the Crown of salvation? Will I wear that crown after I rise from the dead on Judgment Day? I want to know NOW if I am to be so encouraged in the face of all that’s going on in the world! I want to know NOW if I am to look forward to Jesus’ coming with confidence and without fear.

How can I know? If you believe that Jesus is God who does not lie, you will find this answer in the Gospel promises and in the promises of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Jesus tells us that God’s Elect, the Sheep, hear his voice and know him. Paul also says concerning God’s Elect: *In (Jesus) we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ... And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.* Eph 1 You see, God has told you that in your baptism your sins have been washed away. Jesus tells you whenever you eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord’s Supper that your sins are forgiven! And having believed the Word of Jesus’ death and resurrection, you are marked with God’s seal and promise even before he comes: Christ’s righteousness is your crown!

Jeremiah told the Old Testament Church that when Jesus comes we will call him OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS: *“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.* Je 23 It doesn’t take a theologian to know that Jeremiah is here referring to the birth of Jesus who will live a perfect life on earth in order to save mankind. Those who believe in him will know him as *The LORD Our Righteousness.* Je 23

What a beautiful name! OUR righteousness! Jesus has exchanged my sin for his perfect holiness. He wore a crown of thorns so that I might wear his crown of righteousness. We don’t see that yet. We only see the cross and the empty Easter tomb. But on Judgment Day Jesus says: *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’*

We, however, will be amazed. The Bible says: *Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we... do all that?’ Well, with sin paid for on the cross and sin washed away in baptism, there’s nothing else but the righteousness of Jesus for God to see. And so Jesus says he will declare: ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you*

did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' The King will declare this! There is nothing else we can do before this truth but to rejoice and to look forward to his coming!

Can you do that? Can you find your joy and comfort in the promises of our Lord that tell you over and over again that your sins are forgiven and you are therefore through faith in him already wearing his crown of righteousness? Then look forward to that day with joyful anticipation, and worship the King who is coming! Amen.