

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Last Sunday of the Church Year  
November 26, 2023  
Sermon by Pastor Chris Pflughoeft  
**All rise for the honorable judge!**

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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.

—Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 (EHV)

As he entered the courtroom, the weight of guilt hung heavy on his shoulders. Each step echoed the thud of his racing heart, a metronome marking the seconds until judgment. The room's hushed whispers intensified his inner turmoil. Sweating palms betrayed his nerves, fingers fidgeting like the shards of a shattered alibi. Guilt, like an unrelenting specter, whispered reminders of his transgressions. With every passing moment, the courtroom walls closed in, confining him to a suffocating truth. In that silent chamber, he awaited the inevitable reckoning of his choices. Finally, he hears the call as the judge enters, "All rise for the honorable Judge!"

This is an experience that I have never had. Perhaps, many of you have not either. Yet, we know that judgment is coming. In this vision given to Daniel, he sees God seated on his throne for judgment. Yet, he also sees the confidence of believers in the face of this judgment in the coming of the Son of Man.

Today, as we consider the end of the time in between, we consider the confidence that we have as we hear the call "All rise for the honorable Judge!"

As we approach this vision given to Daniel, it is important to first understand something called "prophetic perspective." This is something we can understand living in a valley with a view of mountains. As you look southwest toward the Sierra Estrellas, you see a mountain range. They appear together. Some parts of those mountains are closer than others, but from a distance, you cannot tell. This is how the prophetic perspective works. The prophets were simply given a vision. They didn't always see what comes first. They just saw what was coming.

This helps us understand the order of events in the vision given to Daniel here. Although judgment comes first in this vision and the Son of Man comes second, this does not mean these things will happen in such an order. In Matthew 25, Jesus lays out the sequential order for us of these events. First, the Son of Man will come in the clouds. Then, the Ancient of Days will judge according to what is written in the scrolls.

In the second part of this vision, Daniel sees one like a son of a man coming. The term son of man causes us to think about his human nature and appearance. The word "like" makes us think about how he is greater than just any ordinary man. The New Testament testimony makes it clear to us based on the use of the term "Son of Man." The "Son of Man" is Jesus.

Jesus ascended into heaven where he is seated at the right hand of the Father. This is a position of power and authority. Peter spoke about Jesus being in this position in his Pentecost sermon. Paul also speaks about this glory of Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11, "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus is the Son of Man who was given dominion, honor, and an eternal kingdom. He will come in the clouds on the last day. On that day, willingly or unwillingly, all nations will have to acknowledge his glory. Jesus will come to judge. On the last day, all will rise for the honorable Judge. Those who have died before that day will be brought to life. Then, all will be judged.

There will be judgment on that day. Daniel saw this in the first part of his vision. In this part of his vision, he sees the Ancient of Days. The Ancient of Days seems to be a title for God in general, or in specific the Father. He is seated on a throne. People have remarked about the importance of the plural nature of thrones here. It would seem appropriate to see that the Son of Man is seated on his throne as well.

In this vision, we hear descriptive pictures of God's glory. Then, surrounding God's throne are his holy angels. There is an uncountable amount of them surrounding him. They all then took a seat because the court was in session.

When the court was seated, the books were opened for judgment. Further information for this judgment was shared in a similar vision given in Revelation 20. There it is written, "I also saw the dead, great and small, standing in front of the throne, and books were opened. Another book was also opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged by

the things written in the books, according to what they had done.” (Revelation 20:12) Those who had done evil, were judged according to their evil actions which were recorded in these books. Those who were condemned to destruction in hell did not have their names written in the Book of Life. The Book of Life is God’s record of the elect. These people were saved and brought to eternity in heaven because of what Jesus had done for them.

Ultimately, brothers and sisters, this vision is simple. Jesus is coming again. On the last day, God will judge all people. Those who rejected Jesus will be condemned to eternal destruction in hell. The believers in Jesus will live in Christ’s eternal kingdom because they were declared “not guilty” by Jesus’ works of salvation.

This is the basic truth of the Christian faith. Christ will come again in judgment, are you ready? Regularly, our church offers a class called Bible Basics. This curriculum was written by Pastor Buchholz. This class is intended to bring people to know the basic truths of God’s Word. It is also the next step into communion at Emmanuel. Our next Bible Basics class begins Thursday, January 11 for those who want to learn these things.

During the first lesson of Bible Basics, we establish the truth that you will one day stand before God’s judgment throne. Then, we ask “If you were to die tonight and tonight you were to stand before God in judgment, would God receive you into heaven? Yes, No, or I hope so. When God asks you, ‘Why should I let you into heaven?’ what will you respond?”

After we ask people this question, we walk through the Bible’s answer as to why someone can confidently say yes. This is because of what Jesus Christ has done. Recognizing our sinful state and inability to save ourselves, God the Father sent his Son to take flesh, live, and die for us. Jesus Christ lived perfectly for us. Then, he died for the sins of the whole world on the cross. Therefore, our sins were forgiven. Also, Jesus’ perfection is given to us. We are declared not guilty. We are justified. Through faith given by the Holy Spirit, we receive results of God’s wonderful work in Jesus.

At the end of this first lesson, we once again ask people the same question about standing before God in judgment. Our hope and prayer is that through our teaching and testimony, the Holy Spirit brings these people to the confidence that they can say “Yes, because Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose for me.”

When is the last time that you have considered such a question? For some of you, it may be when you took Bible Basics to join our church. For others, it may be in youth confirmation instruction. For others, it might be a question with which you wrestle often in your head. The last judgment is coming. When you stand before God in judgment, will he receive you into heaven?

Several answers might float through a person’s head. “Yes, no, I hope so.” Some will say “Yes” because of the things that they have done here on earth. Yet, that is not a solid foundation. God demands perfection. Others might say “Yes” because of a false notion of universal salvation. Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Others might say “No” or “I hope so” because they have been plagued with all sorts of shame due to their sins. Although a Christian knows the truth of the gospel, he might struggle to grasp it as his own. Faith is more than just knowledge. Faith is also assent. Perhaps, the person knows that Jesus forgave the sins of the whole world on the cross, but he struggles to see that this means he too is forgiven in Jesus.

In such a case, confidence for Judgment Day comes from God’s preached word. If you feel uncertainty regarding your forgiveness, listen, as God sends the message of assurance, forgiveness, and eternity to you. You can have the same assurance as the Apostle Paul. “This saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,’ of whom I am the worst.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

As you live in the time between Jesus’ ascension and his second coming, you can live with confidence. During this time, we suffer heartache, disease, abuse, and many such trials. Yet, we can have confidence that a day will come when all these things are gone. Heartache, gone. Disease, gone. Abuse, gone. Confidence on Judgment Day means confidence of eternal life in heaven.

Brothers and sisters, the Son of Man will come in the clouds. The final judgment will come. You have been made ready in Jesus. Therefore, you do not need to fear the final judgment. Your sins are all forgiven. You are clothed in Jesus’ perfection. You can look forward with your heads held high. As Jesus said, “But when these things begin to happen, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is near.” (Luke 21:28)

A guilty man would walk into the courtroom with sweaty palms and a knot in his stomach. Fear would fill his heart. An innocent man does not feel that way. You have nothing to hide. You have no alibi. Your sins are remembered by the judge no more. You can be happy to hear “All rise for the honorable Judge!” Amen.