

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Last Judgment Sunday

November 8, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

The record of a lifetime

—Daniel 7:9,10

Do you remember where you were this past week? Google remembers. If you had the GPS feature activated on your mobile phone, Google kept track of everywhere you went. Do you remember what web sites you visited this past week? Google remembers. Every place you visited is recorded in your browsing history. Do you remember what you posted on the web this past week? Facebook remembers. Do you remember what you purchased this past week? Your credit card company remembers every transaction with every vendor. Do you remember what you thought this past week? Google might not know exactly what you were thinking, but it sure tries hard to guess. It uses your browsing history and your physical movements and runs them through very sophisticated algorithms to try to predict what you want to buy (so that they can show you ads), where you want to go (so they can show you ads), whom you are interested in (so they can show you ads), and a whole lot more. Obviously you can change your privacy settings, you can surf the web incognito, you can pay cash at the store, you can do lots of things to minimize your footprint in the virtual world, but the fact remains that you and I are under constant surveillance. We are always being watched and tracked. And the cumulative history of the things we have done, posted, purchased, viewed—it creates a profile of who you are, your interests, your preferences, your character. It is the record of a lifetime.

Google is not God; Google hasn't even been around for more than a couple decades of human history. Now think of how Internet tracking pales in comparison to the all-seeing eye of God. God never sleeps. He sees everything you do. He knows everything you do. He knows every thought. Every wayward glance. Every self-centered ambition. Every malicious slur. Every cutting word. Every deception, not just the lies we tell others but even the lies we tell ourselves. Every careless slip. Every angry, spiteful, greedy, lustful, blasphemous, idolatrous thought. Everything! As Scripture says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account" (Hebrews 4:13). Everything is engraved in the memory and mind of God. Your whole life. It is the record of a lifetime.

People are destined to die once and then to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Today we observe Last Judgment Sunday. The day of the final judgment is coming. This is not theory, this is not speculation. It's only a matter of time until time runs out and eternity begins. We have nothing to say about it. Either the Lord Jesus will return suddenly, unexpectedly on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead, or you and I will reach the end of our earthly days and our soul will be summoned before God. As the Apostle Paul says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Daniel saw a vision of Judgment Day. In his vision *the court was seated, and the books were opened*. St. John saw a similar vision in his book of Revelation: "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Revelation 20:12). The record of a lifetime is placed under scrutiny. It's the record of *your* lifetime laid open for everyone to see. The prospect is terrifying! Our very best intentions are exposed as coming up way short of God's requirements. Our most embarrassing and shameful moments are rolled out for all to see. We want to run and hide, even call out to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and say to the hills, "Cover us!" but there is no place to hide. There is no place to run. There is no escape.

The God before whom we must give an account is an awesome God, the God of perfect justice and holiness. In Daniel's vision he appears as the *Ancient of Days*, the one who is from everlasting to everlasting. *A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him*. The Lord God is the God of absolute purity, transcendent holiness, a consuming, refining fire. There is no negotiating a settlement with him; there is no art of the deal. There are no excuses. There is no slack for good intentions. There are no points for trying. There is innocent or guilty. God does not compare us to others; he holds us to the standard of himself: "Be holy as I the LORD, your God, am holy," God says (Leviticus 19:2). He is the God who does not leave guilty unpunished. You know that it must be this way. Justice demands it. Every sin must be punished. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The consequences of sin are eternal—blackest outer darkness and unquenchable fire, eternal torment for all who have disobeyed God.

How do you and I view Judgment Day? On the one hand it fills us with fear. It should. It will be a dreadful, awful day. A day of reckoning. Imagine being called to stand before God, the judge of all, and finding out he's not the sweet little old man in a rocking chair that so many people paint him to be. We are acutely aware of our own sins. We cannot erase them or undo them or excuse them. They are the record of our lifetime.

There is only one hope for rescue—only one. His name is Jesus Christ. He was called “Jesus”—which means “The Lord Saves”—because he came to save his people from their sins. His title is “Christ”—which means “Chosen One”—because he was chosen by the Almighty to bring salvation. Judgment Day is coming, but it is God's eternal plan and most fervent desire to rescue people from their sins and the coming wrath. God *loves* the world, and God *wants* people to stand in the judgment; God *wants* people to be free from wrath and punishment for their sins. But God's justice requires that sin be punished, so God sent a Substitute to take upon himself that punishment. Our Substitute is none other than God's own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, eternally begotten of his Father, the eternal God who took on flesh, entered our world, and took our place. Jesus is our proxy, our stand-in. The beautiful thing about Jesus is that he was perfect in every way. He was immaculately conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. He was born under the law of God. He had to do everything God's moral law requires—and he did! He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). He never sinned! The record of Jesus' lifetime was unblemished, completely perfect! Then, at the end of his perfect life on earth, Jesus offered his perfect, immaculate life as the substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. The righteous stood in place of the wicked. The innocent stood in place of the guilty. When Jesus died on the cross God poured out all his furious wrath against your sins and my rebellion, and God's justice was satisfied in the holy sacrifice of Jesus. On the third day God raised Jesus to life again to show that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted, God's justice was satisfied. The sin of the world was laid on Jesus—an enormous, infinite, unthinkable burden—and Jesus bore our sin in his body and carried it all away.

When Judgment Day dawns and the books are opened, there is only one thing that can expunge the record of our lifetimes: It is the record of *Jesus'* lifetime. It is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sins. There is only one thing that can prevent our sins from testifying against us and Satan from accusing us: It is the perfect intervention (intercession) of Jesus, who speaks to the Father in our defense (1 John 2). There is only one thing that can cover our guilt and hide our filth: It is the garments of Jesus' perfection that cover our sins. You are baptized into Christ and clothed with Christ. You see, as you trust in Jesus, the record of *his* lifetime becomes the record of *your* lifetime. His record is imputed to you! God's wrath is propitiated (appeased). Justice has been satisfied. Death is defeated. Hell holds no terrors. Your sins are forgiven. The verdict on Judgment Day is predetermined: All sin removed, your record cleared, “Not guilty!” for Jesus' sake.

Let's reflect on what this means. First, Judgment Day is coming; it's not a matter of if but when. Since we don't know when it's coming, we need to be ready. Every day is a day to live in Jesus. Repent of sin, run to Jesus, and hide in Jesus' wounds for forgiveness and cleansing. Then you're ready for Judgment Day or for the day of your own death whenever the Lord should call. You're ready! Second, when we're ready for Judgment Day we can look forward to Judgment Day. Bring it on! Christ is for me, and I am in Christ, so that's the day you and I will be ushered into heaven! Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Third, since you and I are prepared for the final Judgment, we can reflect on what that means. You and I have been rescued from our sins! We've been snatched from hell—at the enormous cost of Jesus' life blood! We can't help but reflect and be amazed at how great God's love is. God did everything for you, so that you should belong to him and live forever with him. The life we live we now live in him who loved us and gave himself for us. Fourth, since nobody escapes God's judgment we don't have to worry about our judgment. When we see sin going unpunished in this world, people thumbing their nose at God, defying him with impunity—well, the day is coming when the most brazen, mouthy, defiant rebel will have to answer to God who says, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (Romans 12:19). Finally, God does not want people to die in their sin; he wants them to repent and live. Judgment Day is coming, and your friends, your family, your loved ones, every soul needs Jesus for forgiveness. You are the one who gets to share Jesus' love.

On the Last Day, when the dead are judged, you're going to see something special. Since the record of your life has been cleared in Christ, now the only book that has anything written in it is the Lamb's Book of Life. That's where your name was entered on God's register when you were baptized. It's the record that holds the names of those who are innocent and free from sin, for Jesus' sake. Your name is written there. It's the record of a lifetime that stands for eternity. Amen.