

## Beginning with the End in Mind

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**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

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Today, we are beginning a new sermon series called *Parables and Possessions*. We heard a very short parable in our gospel reading just a few moments ago. But I am hoping that if we talk about possessions right now, I will get to prepare you for what is to come—I think that the Amazon Special Shopping Day is coming up in less than two and a half short weeks. Black Friday is also coming soon. I am sure you have had talks about Christmas and presents. All of this is already happening and already swirling around.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to talk about what these possessions mean to us, what places they have in our lives, and what scripture has to say about them. Today, as we start this series on *All Saints Day*, it is even more appropriate because, as we think about today, our stuff, and how we live, the first thing I want to encourage you to do is to *Begin with the End in Mind*.

This morning, we were able to focus on that just a little bit as we heard the names of all the people that you all have submitted over the last few weeks, of people that you have lost this year, that you have loved so dearly, that are with the Lord right now. It forces us to think about our end. It forces us to think about what legacy are we living, about what today means, what legacy these people left for us, and more than that, how Jesus makes His way into this. Beginning with the End in Mind helps us understand that Jesus does not just make His way into it, but He is at the center of all the things that we have, of all the things that we want, of the things that we desire, of our entire life.

So today, we begin with the end in mind. I want to go directly to the End. Our reading from the Book of Revelation, chapter 7, is this beautiful picture of what the saints who have gone before us are experiencing in the presence of God right now at this moment. This is not a picture of the

future. This is a picture of today because the church exists not just in this building or on this earth but also with the Lord. My professors at the seminary called this—us, today, the people who are here right now, who are fighting against the powers of evil and the sin that so often just ensnares us and entangles us—we are the *church militants*. We are the ones still fighting the war. But the church who is with the Lord right now that we see in Revelation chapter 7, this is the *church victorious* who has already received that robe of righteousness that Christ has covered them over with, because He has loved them, because He died for them, because they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

So, this picture we see is right now. It is today. The vision that John gets says this: “After this I looked and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes, from all people, from all languages...”, we are all standing before the throne of God, the Father, and before the Lamb, Jesus Christ, sitting in his right hand, “...clothed in white robes that have been washed white with the blood of the Lamb and with palm branches in their hands” (v. 9). Why are there palm branches in their hands? What is the deal with palm branches? It is peace, right? It is when you are in the presence of a king who has brought peace, you have palm branches, and you wave them around. The *church victorious*—the ones that we have loved who have gone before us from all of time are seated and standing with everyone else of every demarcation of human being that could possibly be—is worshipping the Lord, singing His praise, experiencing His goodness. There is no more sadness. There is no more suffering. There are no more tears because the perfect joy of the Lord is what they are bathed in. This is happening now. This is the *church victorious*, while we, today, here, gathered right now, are the *church militant*.

But I said, we need to begin with the end in mind. If this is happening today, then that is not really the end. We get a picture of the end from Isaiah chapter 65, where we get a prophecy about what God is going to do at the end of all time. When Jesus said, I will return and make everything new, He meant it. He is going to come back, and when He does, He will create new heavens and new earth. They will come together to be one, and

the bodies and the souls that have been torn apart by death will be put back together again. This is “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting” that we proclaim that we believe in every week. The “resurrection of the body and the life everlasting” is what Isaiah is prophesying, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (v. 17).

At the end what God is going to do is make everything new. He is going to make heaven and earth come back together so that His kingdom—His kingdom that we only see through bits and pieces through parts of things; we see it through scripture, through the sacraments; we see it through the love and grace that we share with one another; but it is shrouded by our sin. It is shrouded by the suffering that we experience. It is shrouded by these little pieces of death that we experience all the time, that ache you woke up with this morning which you did not ever have before, and all the other things that just plague our bodies, these things shroud our eyes so that it is harder to see the reality of the kingdom of God right here. But one day, when Jesus returns, we will see perfectly. God’s kingdom will be made new. Just like it was in the Garden of Eden, He will remake it so that everything is perfect. That is our hope. That is what we hope for. That, at end of all things, is where our eyes go when we mourn. It is where our heart goes when we mourn. We know that God is going to make everything right. We trust in Him that He will do it. And He will. That is His promise. That is the end of everything. So, when I say we need to begin talking about our lives today with that end in mind, that is the end that I have in mind, and I hope that is the end that you have in mind, too. That Jesus is going to make everything new. That Jesus’ kingdom is the one that is the real, the true kingdom. And that as we live today, we actually are serving in that kingdom already.

When it comes to our things, our stuff, our possessions, we must talk about ownership. And the one truth that scripture keeps coming back to is that there is a master who owns everything. And that He is coming back again. So, in that idea, who is the Master? God, right? Over the next few weeks, you are going to have the choice to make and the opportunity to replace that Master. That is always the hardest thing. As we get caught up in the

whirlwind of all the things that are happening in our lives, we often tend to think that we have control of the things that are going on around us, in us, and through us. We tend to think that we are the master of all the things that happen around us, and even of our things. But we know that there is only one. There is only one, and He is returning, and all the things are His.

This is our parable today that Jesus tells. Now, Jesus is telling this parable on His way to Jerusalem. In fact, He is in Jerusalem already. This is Matthew 24. He is talking to people around Him who are very well-to-do. They have high status. They have done well for themselves. People think well of them. And He tells them this parable to remind them who they truly are. He says to them, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?” (v. 45).

We have identified who the master is. So, who is the servant? It is us. We are the servants. And if we are the servants, then all the stuff that exists, whose is it? Is it the servants, or is it the masters? It is the masters. So, the master has set the servant over his possessions, his stuff, his things, and he asks the servants to be faithful to him and wise. In other words, to steward, to be stewards of all the things that he has given them.

And then he gives them a purpose for all of this. He says it is not just for nothing. It is for a purpose. It is for the servants to give the master and his kingdom their food at the proper time. So, at just the right time, the servants are called upon to use the things the master has given them for the good of the kingdom. Today, as we live here, as we go about our way, the place that God has put us, the time He has put us in, the neighborhoods and the communities in which He has placed us, we are called to give people the things of the kingdom now. The master owns the stuff. He allows the servant to steward his stuff, and he gives them a purpose for that stuff, to help the kingdom of God be known.

Oftentimes in church language, this, the stuff, has been grouped into these three things: time, talent, and treasures. You have time. God has given you time. He has given you unique talents, gifts, and skills, and He has also

given you treasures. He has given you stuff. He has given you things that you possess, money, opportunity, status, all these things. In this parable, Jesus is reminding us that we have been given all these things to use on His behalf. That is the key, and that is the twist through which, over the next few months as we get into this time of trying to figure out what do we do, how do we bless others, how do we be generous with our things? There is a reason for this if we look at it through this lens of thinking of the end. The end goal is to keep the kingdom of God in mind. It is taking what we know is going to happen in the future and the goodness and the grace of Jesus and bringing it into the present, of showing people around us how much God loves them, how much He cares for them, how much, just like you and me, when Jesus went to the cross and took our sins, He did it for them too, and there is life and freedom in that. How do we use our time, talent, and treasures to help people experience that? And believe that Jesus is the one who brings them life, who can give them hope that lasts throughout all of eternity.

Jesus gives a promise that when we focus on this end, when we focus on the kingdom of God instead of building our own kingdom. He says this, “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions” (vv. 46-47).

So, if we just do all the right stuff right now, then on the last day we are going to get bonus treasure chests; we are going to get huge possessions; We are going to get everything? Is that what it is saying? I want you to think critically with me. What are God’s possessions? What are His most treasured possessions?

And on that last day, as we, by God’s Spirit, use our time, talent, and treasures to bring the grace of Jesus into the lives of people, we get to leave a legacy of these treasured possessions, a legacy of God showing up in people is lives and bringing them to faith. We get to leave a legacy of making the kingdom of God grow, helping others experience this hope that we have. Blessed is the servant who keeps on using their time, talents, and treasures for the goodness of the kingdom of God until He comes again. Through that, the kingdom of God is made huge.

Whose kingdom are you building? You are going to be bombarded with letters, ads, and all kinds of things in the next six weeks. Whose kingdom are you building through what God has blessed you with? Keep that in mind as you go through all of these decisions that you are going to have to make over the next few months.

I always like to have a little way to help me through that, a way that helps me remember to stay focused on that. And as I have taught this over the whole time I have been a pastor, I have taught this in a very simple way. As we focus on keeping God's kingdom first, we focus on this virtue, this thing that the Holy Spirit builds within us called generosity. You have heard this word before. You know what this means. You have heard it in different contexts. But here, it is a way to remember that we are blessed in order to bless others, that whatever we have exists for a reason. It exists to help God's kingdom grow and to bless others through it. I use three P's to help us remember how to be generous.

The first one is *priority*. You make being generous a priority. In other words, you have to say, whose kingdom am I building? Am I building my own kingdom, or am I building God's kingdom? And when you look at building God's kingdom, making that a priority, you are well on your way to being generous.

The second is to be *proportional* in your giving, in your generosity. Now, I could say today that it is truly generous to give a hundred dollars to X charity, whatever you could say. For someone, that might be their entire money for the whole week, versus another person that might be half a percent of their money for the week. Which truly is generous? Well, they are both generous. But God calls us to give proportionally. In fact, throughout Scripture, He called His people to give first fruits. He called them to give when they received a harvest, or whatever they received for that season. He asked them to give a portion of that back to Him first before they did anything else. Can you as parents or grandparents try to understand why He did that? Because when you have to do that, you focus on what is truly important. You see that. You remember that God has gifted this to you in the first place. And you return a portion of it to Him

first. So, return this proportion to the Lord first. Priority and proportional, that is how it works together.

The last one is how the Holy Spirit works through you to *progressively*, throughout your life, increase the ways that you are generous. We grow in this. Just like we grow in our faith, just like we grow in our understanding of God, we grow in so many ways, we grow in generosity as well. These three P's help me remember to keep God's kingdom first. I hope they help you as well.

Today, let's focus on *priority*. Question: is giving back to the Lord your first priority when deciding how to use your time, talents, and treasures? Tough question. But it is one that the scripture puts to us. Are we building God's kingdom or our own? And are we building God's kingdom first or with what is left over? Different questions. Different answers. Our calling is to see that His kingdom is the most important kingdom. And as we grow in understanding, we start to see how giving back to the Lord first truly is an incredible blessing. It is a way that we are able to remember that we truly are just servants, stewarding all the things that He has given us.

There is a way that you can do this today. If you downloaded Church Center app, on the very front of the home page, you will see a button that says, "Join a Serve Team". If you click that button, you will see all the different ways that you can volunteer right here through Our Savior's Way. Not just on Sunday mornings, but outside of Sunday mornings, too. It is a way that maybe if you have been thinking about how you can use your talents for the good of the Lord and have not been able to do that yet, it is an easy way for you to take that first step in doing so.

So, here, just to go backward just a little bit, as we walk the way of Jesus together here at Our Savior's Way, these three things we can keep in mind today: *Begin with the end in mind*, know that at the end, Jesus is making all things new, that His kingdom is coming, that He is making bodies and souls back together again, this resurrection, and He is showing people how good He is. Can we do that today as the church on earth? Can we give people glimpses of that? Absolutely. It is His kingdom that we are part of.

How do we then as stewards *steward our time and talent and our treasures*? And then, can we live through this *3P Generosity*, focusing on *priority*, *proportional*, and *progressive*?

We are going to hit those next two P's next week and focus on that just a little bit more. The reason why we are talking about this is so that today you can be focused on the incredible blessings that God has for you, to be reminded that He has gifted you all the things that you have is freeing. It is a reminder to put everything in that proper priority structure that you so hope to have, but maybe have not had time to put together. Now is the time. Now is the time.

Let's close with prayer. *Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today, for leading us and guiding us, for reminding us of your kingdom, this kingdom in which you bring life and hope through your blood and through your resurrection. We ask, Lord, that you would allow us to see our place in this world as people who are your servants, stewarding the things that you have given us, allowing us, by the power of your Spirit, to help other people experience the goodness of your kingdom. Lord, we pray that you would allow us to focus on that this season, knowing that through your spirit you encourage us and allow us to be generous for the good of those around us. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*