Mondovi: Our Savior's, Gilmanton & Montana: Salem United Methodist Churches
11.22.2026, Reign of Christ Sunday, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

"The Lord Calls Us from the End"
Matthew 25:31–46

Let us pray: Father God, the Creator and Lord of time, through your Word today, help us to hear the call that comes to us from the end of time. We will respond to that call in faith. In our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.

The white hair of the elderly is a symbol of wisdom. Even if older people learn new technologies such as AI from younger generations, they are still wise because they stand at the far end of life's journey. The wisdom of the elderly is, in a sense, like "advice from a time traveler." Having lived through life, they know what truly matters and what is meaningless, and so they can encourage those living today to focus on what is essential.

If you could see yourself thirty years from now and then return to today, how would you live this day?

Do you remember an old movie called *Back to the Future*? Marty, a high school student, accidentally gets into a time machine built by an eccentric scientist, Dr. Brown, and travels thirty years into the past. There, he meets his father and mother as teenagers. Marty realizes that he must bring the two together for him to exist, so he struggles to help them fall in love. He helps his timid father, George, find the courage to defeat a bully and win the heart of his mother, Lorraine.

One of the central messages of this movie is that choices made in faith, beyond determinism, can change the future. This is well captured in Dr. Brown's words: "Your future hasn't been written yet. No one's has. Your future is whatever you make it. So make it a good one."

Friends, the Bible makes us wise, like the elderly, regardless of our age. It does so because the Bible tells us how things will end. For the past several weeks, we have been talking about the last days and the end times. Today's passage brings that discussion to its ultimate conclusion by speaking about the final judgment.

When the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, comes, he will come "in his glory, and all the angels with him," and "he will sit on his glorious throne" (v. 31). Glory and throne are words that signify Jesus' kingship and authority. At the end, everyone will see that Jesus is the true King.

Knowing in advance that Jesus will one day come and sit on his throne changes the choices we make today. We begin to regard God's Word as the law of our lives, as the royal decree of our King, and to live under his rule. In this way, knowing the end times gives us the perspective of looking at today from the vantage point of the end of the world.

Those who recognize that he is the King understand that today is a *kairos* moment, a time granted by the King, and they worship him. They bow down before his lordship. Do they wait until some distant future when they have time? No. I bless you in the name of Jesus that you may live each day recognizing that Jesus is the true King.

This King is also the King who comes to judge. "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (v. 32). Everyone will see that he is the King of kings who gathers all nations before him.

This is exactly what Revelation 19:16 says: "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." Regardless of their position or status in this world, every person will stand before him as one who is being judged.

The King "will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left" (v. 33). In ancient society, the right side symbolized authority and power. In the Middle East, sheep and goats were raised together, and this traditional practice continues even today. Sheep and goats in that region look quite similar in body shape and color from a distance, making them difficult to distinguish. They graze together during the day, but at night they are kept in separate shelters because their sleeping habits and temperature preferences are different.

A shepherd can distinguish sheep from goats with certainty. When the final moment comes and Jesus returns, he will use the discernment of the King to separate people precisely, just as a shepherd separates sheep from goats, even though they have lived together without being distinguished from one another.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (v. 34). The blessing of those on the right, the blessed ones, is to inherit the kingdom prepared for believers from the foundation of the world. God had us in mind from the very beginning and had even prepared this gift for us. The word "inherit" reveals our identity and status. What kind of status is that? It is the status of a king, one who is given a position of rule.

The virgins who had prepared their oil entered the bridegroom's feast, and those who multiplied their talents were entrusted with greater things and entered into their master's joy. But today's passage takes this even further, telling us that we will inherit kingship.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible shows us that we were originally created to be kings. Genesis 1:28 says, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" To exercise dominion is what a king does.

But Adam fell from his position of kingship because of his sin. What the true King, Jesus, accomplished through his death on the cross and resurrection was to restore us, who had fallen from our royal position because of sin, to that place of kingship. 1 Peter 2:9 tells us who we are: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession."

Revelation 22:5 also says, "And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever." The ultimate destiny of believers is everlasting kingship. The Bible concludes with the fulfillment of God's promise.

Knowing this, we will not be dragged around as slaves to sin, slaves to money, or slaves to those around us. Of course, it is our duty to faithfully carry out the responsibilities entrusted to us. But when we know our identity as those who have been given royal authority, we will not be swayed or driven by the voices of this world.

Jesus says to those on his right, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (vv. 35–36). Reading this passage, one might think that people enter heaven

because they have lived moral and ethical lives. But that is not what it means. We are saved by faith. However, that faith naturally reveals itself through deeds.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:27, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." It is not enough simply to say that we believe. When actions consistent with the life of a believer follow our confession, our faith is demonstrated as genuine.

James 2:14–17 says this: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

What about the opposite? What if someone has deeds but no faith? Good works alone are not sufficient for salvation. Isaiah 64:6 says, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." The righteousness of a human being who has not been redeemed by Christ is like a filthy rag. It cannot cover our sins.

The righteous on the right respond, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?"

Of course, they could say this because they had never seen Jesus in person. But the fact that they do not even recognize what they had done shows that these people did not keep track of their good deeds or calculate what they might gain from them. That is why they do not remember. They are not the kind of people who calculate when the master will return and decide to do something good for about a month just to prepare for the last days. Faith, deeds, and obedience have become part of their everyday lives, ingrained in them. That is what it means to have prepared the oil and to have faithfully put the talents to use.

The King replies, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." If we interpret "the least of these my brothers" as all people who find themselves in difficult circumstances, the message of this parable would move toward a humanitarian ethic. However, since Jesus is speaking to his disciples about what will happen in the end times, we should understand "my brothers" to refer to Jesus' disciples, those who believe in and follow his teachings and who suffer hardship because they proclaim the gospel.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the term "brothers" refers to Jesus' disciples. In Matthew 12:50, Jesus says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Likewise, in Matthew 28:10, Jesus refers to his disciples as "my brothers." Therefore, how we treat Jesus and those who believe in him is a criterion by which our salvation is revealed.

Of course, we should help those who are struggling and in need without placing conditions on them. The gospel of Christ goes hand in hand with bread. But today's parable is not simply about that. It shows that genuine faith will be revealed in the time of persecution that is to come. True faith is not lived in isolation. It is manifested through acts of responsible love within the community of believers.

Jesus identifies believers, the church, with himself. Before Paul's conversion, Jesus appeared to him and asked, "Why are you persecuting me?" Perhaps that experience became the foundation for Paul's later teaching in his epistles that the church is the body of Christ.

In the early church, when a couple of believers were martyred, other believers would adopt and raise their children. When other Christians witnessed this kind of responsible love, they could have been reassured that even if they were martyred for their faith, others would take care of their children and raise them. This would have made it much more possible for them to remain faithful to their faith even in the face of persecution. In this way, martyrdom was not something undertaken by an individual alone, but by the entire community.

The King applies the same standard to the goats on his left. "You did not do it to me." They receive the verdict: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

The church is a community that preserves the gospel, the Word, and the faith. Paul encourages us in Galatians 6:10, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

I am reminded of the time when my wife and I served in the Boston area, in the neighborhood where Harvard University is located. There were many homeless people around Harvard Square. The large American church where our Korean congregation worshiped had several entrances, and homeless people slept in front of those doors every night. Since our church held early morning prayer services, we would encounter them regularly in the early hours of the morning.

There were times when we invited them into our church for a meal, helped them with a little financial support, talked with them, and I still remember some of their names. I also remember a homeless man named Sean whom we often encountered at the library. We saw other churches in the area regularly providing meals for homeless people as well.

As I prepared this sermon, I found myself thinking about them a great deal. Some of them were believers, while others were not, and my wife and I sometimes talked with them in an effort to share the gospel. But we have always felt that we lacked the capacity or faith to do more to help them.

You have already done many good works through faith, and I have seen you love one another within our community. I pray that you will continue to remain faithful and demonstrate your faith through responsible love, so that when we all stand before the Lord at the end, we may be among the sheep. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord, we have heard your voice calling us from the end. As we look forward to the day when we will reign with you, help us renew our response to your call each day. As we love you more than ever, may we not overlook the least of your brothers, but care for them. In doing so, may we preserve and build up the church, the body of Christ, the community of truth and faith, until you come in glory as our King. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.