

There are many things that the Bible does not tell us about the Last Day. No one knows the day or the hour, for example. But there are many things that the Bible does tell us, especially when we put passages together. So what is it that the Bible says?

The Bible tells us that on that day Jesus will return in power and in great glory. Mark chapter 13 says: "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." He who was rejected by the world will appear in power. His coming will not be hidden. It will be visible to all. And the nations will mourn when they see him coming on that day, because God himself will be coming near. It will be the sign of his final and complete victory. And the nations will weep because their end has come.

The Bible tells us that on that day Jesus will descend to the earth. Acts chapter 1 says: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." So just as Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father where he now reigns as King in glory, he will descend in the same way to the earth to sit in judgment over the nations. And all judgment will be given to him, and he will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity!

On that day, we are told that there will be a sound like a great trumpet blast. 1 Thessalonians 4 says: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." When Jesus speaks on that day, he will have a voice like a great trumpet, calling all together from every part of the world. Trumpets were used in the Old Testament to gather Israel together, and the same will be true on that day. That voice like a trumpet will call all, and not just the living either, but also the dead. They will rise from their graves, and all will stand before the Lord on that great and glorious day.

The Bible tells us that on that day a great throne will be set up on the earth. Revelation 20 says: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them." That throne will be white because it is pure, and the judgment that comes forth from that throne will be perfect. Christ will come to set all things right. He will come to repay everyone for what they have done. Because Jesus will sit on that throne, as our reading for today says. All the nations will be gathered before him, and you and I will be in that great group, Christians. You and I will also have to stand before that throne. Are we ready for that day?

But the judgment that will take place on that day will not be long. Verse 32 of our reading says: "Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." So on that great day, the many billions and billions of people standing before the throne will be separated into two groups, and only two groups. Those on his right will be those who will take possession of the kingdom which has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world. May we be found in that group on that day! Those on his left will be those who will enter into the eternal fires of hell prepared for the devil and his angels. So everything depends on that day. That's the entire trial. There will be nothing more to come. There will be no more appeal. Nothing after it. After the sentence is carried out, eternity will begin. And the old creation will be burned up in a judgment of fire, and a new

heavens and a new earth will take its place, where there will be no more sin to corrupt it forever. What a day that is going to be!

But that great separation, Christians, when Jesus will separate all humanity into two groups, are we prepared to hear what Jesus is going to say on that day? Will he say to us, "Come," or will he say to us, "Depart"? Because eternity depends on it. Heaven or hell rides on what Jesus says on that day. So how will Jesus make his decision? What is he going to base his judgment upon? The Bible is perfectly clear. All will be judged on that day for the things that they have done. Our thoughts, our words, our actions will be held up and made clear on that day. And that is what Jesus will base his judgment upon.

Now, maybe that's a little bit confusing to us. Don't we say that the Bible says we are saved by faith, right? Ephesians chapter 2 says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." So why then does the Bible also say that we will be judged on that day on the basis of our works? Is there a contradiction between these two parts of the Bible?

Not at all, actually. The two go very well together, in fact. Because faith is something that cannot be seen, Christians. God knows who has faith, but it's not like we can see it. We can't tell just by looking at someone who believes and who doesn't. But works are something that cannot be hidden. Works are something that show the truth of our hearts. They show the truth of whether we have faith or not. As Jesus says in the Gospels, you know a tree by its fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Works make plain whether we have faith, whether we have the faith which ultimately saves.

And in fact, our reading for today from Matthew chapter 25 shows us how these two things go together. Because the king will hold up on that day the works of the sheep on his right. He will praise them for the things that they have done. When I was hungry, he says, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was sick, you visited me. When I was in prison, you came to me. Jesus praises them for all of these things. But the sheep are surprised by this! They had no idea that this had happened. When, Lord? When did we do all of these things? When did we feed you? When did we give you something to drink? And so forth. They're totally unaware they had done it all. Jesus tells them: when you did it for one of the least of these, my brothers, that is, for one of the least of the these, my Christians, you did it also for me.

Now, think about what that means, Christians. The sheep are unaware that they had done all of these things for Jesus because they weren't looking for Jesus, as if Jesus being right in front of them was somehow going to make a difference whether they did it or not. They weren't trying to impress anybody. They weren't trying to make sure that it counted somehow. They saw a need among them, and they simply took care of it. They did what was right to do. They cared for even the very least of the Christians among them. They just did what came naturally. And besides, the more that we grow in faith, the more that we realize our good works are never what they should be anyway. We realize more and more how we are tainted by sin, how we are held back, how our works are not perfect like they should be. The sheep never think that their good works are worth praising. I could've done something better. I could've had a better attitude. I could've done something more right, and then it would've been a truly good work.

But that's not how God thinks about it. God that loves the good works of his saints, even the very least that they do in his name. God praises even if you give a cup of cold water to someone who believes in his name, because that's how much his people mean to him. Those works show that they are his people, that they are like their Father who is in heaven. So yes, this shows us how these two things fit together. Works come naturally from faith. It's the most natural thing in the world, like a tree producing fruit. And so the sheep are surprised when they are praised for them.

But it's the other way with the goats, Christians. The king condemns those on his left for the things that they have done, or rather the things that they have not done. When he was hungry, they did not feed him. When he when he was thirsty, they did not give him something to drink. When he was a stranger, they did not welcome him. When he was sick, they did not visit him. When he was in prison, they did not come to him. And the goats are also surprised that this is true. When, Lord? When did we not do these things for you? Jesus tells them: when you did not do it for one of the least of these, my brothers, my Christians, you did not do it for me.

Think about what that means also, Christians. The goats are unaware that they had not done these things because they were looking. If Jesus had been right in front of them, then they would've done something. Then they would've done something in his name. Seeing Jesus made all the difference here. They were deeply concerned if this counted or not. They were deeply concerned about trying to impress God and trying to impress others. To them their works were everything. To them their works should be praised. To them their good works are something special. They can't even see how miserable they really are. And for that reason, if it was too little, if it wasn't flashy enough, or if it seemed like it wasn't worth their time, then they simply didn't do it. It's very definition of wanting to be saved by works. And so they too are surprised, because Jesus shows them the truth, that their works were not good because they were not done in faith.

So Christians, the point of this passage is not to teach us to pile up good works in the hopes of impressing God on the Last Day. That's not the point of all. Nor does this passage go against what the Bible says about being saved by faith. Rather, if we want to be ready for that day when we will stand before the judgment throne of God, then we must put our trust in Christ alone. Because apart from him, nothing that we do, no matter how impressive it seems, will be good enough. But in him, even the very least thing that we do in his name will not be forgotten. So confess your sins, Christians. Trust in the Lord Jesus by faith, and love one another as he first loved you. And then you will be ready for that great and glorious day when Jesus returns!

Let us pray. O Son of Man, who has received all judgment from the Father and who will judge all the secrets of men on the Last Day, turn us away from ourselves to trust only in you, so that through you we may enter into eternal life; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.