

Matthew 25:31-46

December 12, 2010 – ADVENT 4

Prime the Second Christmas

☆ **in faith** (vv.31-40)

☆ **in realism** (vv.41-46)

In the name of Jesus, our Advent King, dearly redeemed believers:

A few weeks ago I almost didn't go to church. Two Thanksgiving services, our daughter's wedding service, and we were exhausted Saturday evening. I wasn't preaching, so maybe it was time to practice our Christian freedom and not go. Salvation is not by works of ours, but by all the works and righteousness Jesus Christ did. But Sunday morning dawned with renewed energy. I'm so glad we went. My friend and classmate, Pastor Dave Kolander at Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wisconsin, called the Second Advent of Christ, "the Second Christmas." I hadn't thought of it that way. One of our professors once told us, "You never know when God will have that one thing you needed in the service you skipped." Like so much else in our Christian freedom, you can skip, but do "ya really wanna"?

Our Second Christmas may come today with Christ in judgment. Are you primed and ready? Do you cherish your Christian faith like prime beef? Do you nourish your faith in prime time? Through the window of God's Word today our Lord takes us where most people never want to go, but everyone will: God's judgment throne. I'm so glad you're here. God is about to **Prime the Second Christmas** – first...

☆ **in faith** (vv.31-40)

Used to be when I started my snow blower, I had the primer confused with the choke. I thought if I pushed the primer too much, I would drown out the spark the way it floods when you keep the choke on too long. So I talked to one of our members who understands engines. He told me to press slowly to bring the gas up through the tube, then "prime the daylights out of it." So I did. It helps all my engines start better understanding the difference between primer and choke. Doesn't mean I could tear down the engine and fix either one. But I took his advice on **faith** and was not disappointed.

About half our population thinks men don't like to ask for directions. The other half is sure of it. I used to ask for directions until I noticed certain parts of the country would hear my Yankee accent and give me misdirections. Maybe they just didn't know, but they sure wanted me to think they did. Shouldn't be a problem anymore, should it? Now we have GPS. I tried mine on my iPhone first time this Fall. But it kept telling me to turn onto dead-end streets in a tiny town. So I ignored it for a while – until I was seven miles out of my way and had to backtrack. Oh, the arrogance of this technology that knows everything except how to keep itself alive. My battery died before I got home.

Fact is, we're operating on **faith** all the time. Who do you trust? What do you trust? Wouldn't it help to have someone totally trustworthy who is never wrong and always has your best interests in mind? Enter Jesus Christ, our true and living Light. Since He died for you, could He ever steer you wrong? Since He lives again for you, do you really have reason to doubt Him as if His battery could die?

Here we see Jesus in His last week on earth only three days before pouring out His lifeblood for you. Jesus gives a glimpse into the throne room of heaven. He lets us see something no human eyes can because it hasn't happened yet. It's like being warned a bridge is about to collapse so you can stay away. It's like being told your battery will die, so replace it. It's like hearing about the perfect cure for cancer from the best surgeon whose success rate is 100% – and He happens to be your Brother who is also your best Friend. Seems to me no health care system will every match this.

Jesus commissioned His followers to literally "disciple all ethnic groups by baptizing...and by teaching" the whole Word of God (Matthew 28:18-20). Law and gospel, sin and grace, don't leave anything out. That's who's literally gathered here, "all the ethnic groups." The "*sheep*" are "*sheep*" and the

“goats” are “goats.” Nothing has to be decided. The verdict was stated by Christ the King long ago: **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** (Mark 16:16) What could be simpler, what more profound? It takes a little child to grasp this truth with the tiny hands of **faith**. But here we are on Judgment Day with Jesus and **faith** is still the key.

Here’s how we know this is not about salvation by works. **The King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”** See? It’s an “**inheritance**.” You can’t work for an inheritance. The person who dies did that already. Jesus died, but only after He did all the work to earn our eternal **inheritance** with God in heaven. Plus this **“kingdom [was] prepared for you since the creation of the world”** – before you were even a twinkle in your great-great-great Grandfather’s eye.

At least one more thing. God’s Law demands good works all the time and nothing but good works. Can you? I can’t. Neither could these “**sheep**” on the King’s right. But He does not look for works of the Law. Listen: **“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”** If they were trying to earn heaven, they’d all shout, “Yes!” even though they couldn’t remember. But they trust the King’s kindness and honestly ask three times: **“When...? When...? When...?”** The Triune God is not looking for works of the Law. He’s only looking for **“one,”** just **“one”** good deed as evidence of faith. Hear it? **“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”**

Looking forward to that kind of kindness from the King with nail-pierced hands, we can **Prime the Second Christmas – in faith**, but also...

☆ **in realism** (vv.41-46)

Sometimes the pump needed priming on my Granddad’s Blissful Acres Ranch. He said I was his “foreman,” but since I had no crew, I had to prime the pump myself. The pump house supplied water for Granddad and Nani, my great grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins, plus my Mom’s house. It had a pressure tank that got waterlogged. We called it “priming the pump” to drain some of the water and increase the air pocket in the tank that pressurized the water. There are easier ways now, but this was back in the ‘70’s and ‘80’s – eons ago. Realistically, too much water leaves the pump no pressure. If we had a fire, no pressure in the hydrants either. Some say, “Reality bites,” but in this case **realism** burns.

The King is also judging the “**goats**” on His left. It’s not by works of the Law, because if it were, He would be demanding all good works all the time in perfect love for God and selfless love for your neighbor. Neither the “**sheep**” or “**goats**” could give that. Only Jesus can. He lived and died for the “**goats**” too. Jesus the King is looking for evidence of one thing and one thing only. He already stated the verdict for them too. This should come as no surprise: **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** (Mark 16:16) **“One,”** just **“one”** is all He wants to see. They’re asking, **“When...?”** in protest as if He’s accusing them of something they did not do. But once again the King is judging in kindness. **He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”** Civic righteousness does not count on Judgment Day because, **“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”** (Hebrews 11:6)

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” But the “**righteous**” were not so because of the good works they could not remember. The King did all the good works, then gave them credit for tiny things for little people that didn’t seem to count. He declared them “**righteous**” by His own life and death and resurrection. Then He gave them the **faith** to believe it. And the others were not condemned for their works. Christ died for all. Their lack of unselfish good works shows their lack of **faith**. They ignored the needy who could not benefit or repay them.

That’s **realism by faith**. Trust Jesus for the **Second Christmas** when He comes as King and says, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father.** You’re **Primed**. You’re ready. It’s glory time!” Amen.