

The Books Were Opened

✦ The Ancient of Days presiding (v.9)

✦ A river of fire was flowing (v.10)

In the name of Jesus, appointed by God to judge the living and the dead, dearly redeemed saints:

Have you ever read the fifty or sixty pages of fine print in usage licenses these days? Might count today, but tomorrow? Maybe not, because it says something like, “We can change this whenever we want. But you can always opt out if you happen to notice.” And those Privacy Agreements? They boil down to something: “We’re legally obligated to tell you that we plan to share your information with whomever we want. But don’t worry. We won’t share your private information with our competitors! We only share with our partners because they have stuff to sell you too.” Maybe they should close with: “Gotcha!” Reminds me of my fifth grade son at the Oshkosh Fly-in years ago. We had just gotten on the bus out of pouring rain. From the corner of my eye, I saw him making faces at the people outside. “Joel! What are you doing?” He just smiled big and said, “We’re on, and they’re not!”

Who’s on the bus? Where is it going? Seems as if most folks want to drive their own bus their own way like their own god. Some American idols can sing. Some make the “big bucks.” And some are only great in their own minds. What’s Hollywood’s Red Carpet for except for proud, self-righteous people to congratulate themselves while critics only wish they were so beautiful and talented. But what rich and poor, young and old ignore is this: The clock is ticking. God’s judgment is rolling on. Judgment Day is so sure and certain that God speaks of it in the past tense: **The Books Were Opened...**

✦ The Ancient of Days presiding (v.9)

Our life story is told in two books: your checkbook and your datebook. Much of that is online these days, which only makes it more open than ever. What do your times say about you? Is there anyone you love more than yourself? God encouraged His own Israelites: *“If you do away with the yoke of oppression, the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday.”* (Isaiah 58:9f) Would your credit cards, checks and electronic transactions show God is first in your life? That you care for the poor and needy? Or would you be embarrassed?

There’s a part of us that refuses to look at our time and money as anything but ours. Husbands, what’s your first reaction when you hear, “Hey, Honey, would you...”? Ladies, how pleased are you when someone says we need volunteers to clean or count offerings? Kids, when video games have to wait for schoolwork, does it make you want to shout? Friends, do you also struggle daily between what you should do and what you want to do? Saying the words with your mouth is so easy: *“My times are in your hands.”* (Psalm 31:15) But, oh, to say it with your heart – especially when you’re tired! And isn’t that when the toughest test of all? When someone is sick, or has failed in his Christian life?

Today’s Gospel (Matthew 25:31-46) shows how God will expose these failures when **The Books Were Opened – The Ancient of Days presiding**. God has given all judgment to Jesus. *“When the Son of Man comes in glory, with all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”* This publicly announces what has already been decided. “Sheep” are “sheep”; “goats” are “goats.”

But the “goats” want to argue with God. With no evidence of faith in their lives He concludes: *“I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”*

Daniel knew there was no arguing with God, that God is holy beyond imagination. In his visions at night Daniel saw **The Books Were Opened**: *“As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.”* How terrifying if you didn’t know the rest of the story! The *Ancient of Days* has been watching all our time and money. We wrap ourselves in pride and sin; *His clothing* is *as white as snow*. *The hair on his head* is *white like wool*; in perfect wisdom He knows all our thoughts! *His throne* is *flaming with fire*, yet we think we can ignore God as if too busy? His *wheels, all ablaze*, bring every soul to judgment, but we want to drive our own bus? **The Books Were Opened – The Ancient of Days Presiding**. And in this graphic scene of Judgment Day...

✠ A river of fire was flowing (v.10)

What’s in those **Books** which Daniel saw? We need to know because that Day *“is nearer now than when we first believed.”* (Romans 13:11) Our own personal Day could come before the sun goes down. Daniel saw *“a river was flowing, coming out from before [God]. Thousands upon thousands attended him* – countless holy angels in bright, shining clothing, ready and eager to carry souls down to the fire or up to glory as God directs. *“Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him”* – all waiting to be judged by Him who sees our lives, our checkbooks, our time, everything no one else knows and we forget. How will we survive when *“the court was seated, and the books were opened”* ?

The Holy Spirit says a lot in the Bible about books. *“The books”* here seem to be the record of everyone’s life, what you thought, felt, did from the very beginning. King David confessed, *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”* (Psalm 51:5 NIV84) God’s video runs from cradle to the grave. What’s in your file today before church? What about yesterday?

Here’s how God pictures the beauty of His grace. He finds a file with your name on it. The cover is marked black with “S – I – N.” But inside, it’s empty, except for one entry: “Forgiven!” – and signed in the blood of Jesus Christ. Yesterday too. All our sins have been blotted out from God’s Book of Life. It carries the results of His New Covenant of pure grace with one stipulation: “Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 10:17) That’s because *“the blood of Christ that purifies us from every sin.”* (1 John 1:7) And *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men’s sins against them.”* (2 Corinthians 5:18) Better yet, counting Christ’s righteous ours by faith.

God pictures universal objective / justification like a book in which He wrote everyone’s name when He raised Jesus from the dead. But *“those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.”* (Jonah 2:8 NIV84) God covered the world with a warm blanket of grace in Christ. Unbelief says, “No way! I don’t need a Savior! I’m good enough the way I am! God should just accept me!”

Did you read this month’s issue of *Forward in Christ*? Imagine our Synod President Mark Schroeder in that story he told about guest preaching in a small Wisconsin town. He’s not paying attention while looking for the church, so a cop pulls him over. He’s doing 42 in a 25-mile-an-hour zone. But the officer gives him a break and says, “That’s a hard church to find. Follow me.” Would he take a different road? Or breathe a sigh of relief for mercy and follow close behind? That’s the point of President Schroeder’s story. We love Jesus’ invitation: *“Follow me.”* He leads us home to heaven.

When I hear **A river of fire was flowing**, I can’t help remembering that ancient city of Pompeii. Looking down on its immorality and corruption was Mount Vesuvius, belching fire. But the big blow seems to have come so quickly that no one escaped. People’s contorted remains have been found in rooms where they tried to hide. But you know where they found Pompeii’s sentinel? The soldier was standing at his post. Hot ash buried him, but he stayed where he was commanded.

If so much loyalty could stand for an earthly officer, how much more for **The Ancient of Days**? He erased our record of sin, and wrote in the righteousness of Christ. His kindhearted judgment on our faith is this: *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”* (Matthew 25:40 NIV84) In Jesus, it’s a great Day when **The Books Were Opened** ! Amen.