

No Invitation

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Introduction.

- A. Among many other traditions that we have in the churches of Christ in the United States, we have the tradition of offering an invitation to obey the gospel at the end of every sermon, and indeed, at some point during each service. There's nothing at all wrong with this tradition. Indeed, we see gospel preachers in the first century offering an invitation at the end of their sermons on many occasions, like Paul did in Acts 17:30-31.
- B. However, even though the Scriptural record clearly allows us to extend an invitation, it does not require us to do so. Just as some preachers in the first century concluded their sermon with an invitation, some did not. Indeed, when we look at the end of Stephen's sermon before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:51-53, he winds things up not by inviting his audience to obey, but by condemning them because he knows they won't obey.
- C. Following that first-century example, at the end of the sermon this morning, I'm not going to offer an invitation, nor will there be an invitation hymn. I'm going to say my piece, sit down, and then, after a moment, we'll take up the collection. Now, if somebody jumps up during the collection and wants to be baptized, I'm sure we'll be able to provide water, but that's not a response I'm going to invite.
- D. Here's why: As most of us know, in this auditorium this morning are several people who need to obey the gospel and just won't. To be honest, I don't understand that, but I can't help but wonder if those folks have a bad case of tomorrow-itis. For all the years those people have been coming to this building and sitting in these pews, every week, without fail, we've extended an invitation. I wonder if this practice has got some folks believing that their opportunities to put on Christ are limitless, that it doesn't matter if they obey this week, because next week, they'll always have another chance. That's not true, and it's a self-deception that may prove deadly. With this in mind, let's look at the events of the end of time, when God will offer no invitation.

I. The End of the World.

- A. The first thing that will happen during the end is that **JESUS WILL RETURN**. Among other places, this promise is repeated by angels in Acts 1:10-11. In context, here's what has happened. The apostles have just watched Jesus ascend into heaven, and, as they're standing there staring up into the sky, probably with their mouths hanging open, two angels sneak up on them and tell them that Jesus is going to come back just like He went away. He will reappear in the skies just like He disappeared in them.
- B. It's important, friends, that we recognize this possibility. Obviously, it's been 2000 years, give or take, since the ascension of our Lord into heaven, but that doesn't make the promise of God any less real or any less valid. God already knows when this is going to happen. He has looked into the future and chosen the moment for the return of Christ that best suits His purposes. That moment may be 5000 years from now; it may be five minutes from now, and once Jesus comes back, folks, it's game over for all of us. His return starts an irreversible process that will result in our being sent to our eternal destinations, based on where we were spiritually at that moment. We need to live each moment, then, so that we're ready and not unprepared.
- C. After Jesus returns, **THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED** by the power of His voice. Jesus Himself predicts this in John 5:28-29. Everybody who has died will rise to life again. This reminds me, in fact, of a really neat hymn by Martin Luther called, "Flung to the Heedless Winds." In that hymn, Luther talks about the martyrs for God who were burned at the stake and had their ashes scattered on the winds. He then goes on to describe how on that day, God will gather all of those ashes back together, and those martyrs will rise again. That's the way it will be for everyone, no matter how mangled. They will rise from their graves and live again.
- D. This is one of the things that makes us special as human beings. There are plenty of people in America today who believe that man is nothing more than just a clever animal, and they compare us to gorillas and bears and dogs. Brethren, on the day of resurrection, there is not going to be one gorilla or bear or dog that rises from its grave. Only humans will return to life, because only we have been given an immortal soul by God. If we were gorillas, I guess it would make sense for us to live for this life only, because it's all we would have. However, because we have souls that will last forever, we need to live now with immortality in view.
- E. After this, God's word warns us that **EARTH WILL BE DESTROYED**. No verse in Scripture is more clear about this than 2 Peter 3:10. It tells us that shortly after Jesus appears unexpectedly—like a thief in the night—that both the physical earth and the physical heavens will be destroyed with an intense fire. In that single day, everything that we have ever seen and known on earth will be consumed forever.
- F. Not everybody believes this. I can think of one religious group in particular that teaches that other than 144,000 chosen people, that most of the righteous will not go to heaven. Instead, this group goes on to claim, God will do a big remodeling project on earth and give that to the righteous, who then will rule over it. Clearly, that's not so, and 2 Peter 3 and a number of other passages prove that it's not so. Our hope needs to be not for a restored earth, but for eternal life in a heaven that is better than we could possibly imagine.

- G. As all this is being accomplished, all the people who have ever lived will be assembled before the revealed Lord, and at that time, **EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**. Consider Paul's testimony about this in Philippians 2:9-11. Just think of what an awesome moment that will be! Presumably, in some way, we will be able to watch the spectacle of the physical creation being burned up, which will be the greatest fireworks display ever seen. Then, to top that off, we will see Jesus, not in His humble fleshly form, but revealed as He truly is, with the majesty and power that only God can have. Is it any wonder that everyone would bow the knee to that?
- H. And everyone will. All of us know people who scoff at God and His law. All of us know other people who deny the God of the Bible and choose to believe in various religious falsehoods. In that day, though, every atheist, every idolater, every infidel, every reprobate WILL kneel before the Almighty and give Him the praise that they fought against giving all of their lives. Nobody gets to sneer at God on the day of judgment, for God will compel them to honor and praise. All of us will be there too. Doesn't matter how we lived. Doesn't matter how we feel about God. We will bow. We will confess. That means, folks, that as human beings, we don't really have a choice about honoring God. The only thing we can choose is when. We can honor Him now before His revelation, when it will still do us good, or we can honor Him later, when it will accomplish nothing.

II. The Judgment.

- A. After everyone has given God the glory He deserves, **JESUS WILL JUDGE THE NATIONS**. Once again, this is a common theme throughout Scripture, but we see it especially in Matthew 25:31-33. Once again, imagine how this is going to look. It's going to be the most awe-inspiring courtroom scene ever. Instead of a human judge, the Son of God Himself will be in the throne of judgment. Instead of a bailiff, behind Him, Jesus is going to have the massed power and glory of the legions of the angels backing Him up. Instead of one defendant, there will be billions, all looking up in awe to the throne of God, and by the end of that dreadful day, every human being ever to live will be sorted into one of two camps: the sheep on the right hand of the throne, and the goats on the left. Every one of us will be in one of those two categories.
- B. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the judgment that we face. My little sister Susan just spent three months studying for the Missouri Bar. I've been down that road. It's not fun. Just like I did, she spent all the time she could frantically preparing for that test, for a whole summer. Why was she so concerned? Because she knew that the future of her career as a lawyer depended on passing that test. Failure was just not an option, so she did everything she could to succeed. Friends, that test that we all face on the day of judgment doesn't determine whether we get to practice law. It determines where we spend eternity. If the Bar is worth studying for three months to pass, how much time should we spend preparing for Judgment Day?
- C. Nor is the content of that trial hidden from us. Instead, the Scripture plainly says that **JESUS WILL USE THE WORD** to judge us. Jesus tells us as much in John 12:48. Folks, God doesn't want any of us to be condemned. He wants as many of us to pass into eternal life as possible, and that's why He spelled out the standard as clearly as He did. Any person with normal intelligence and an honest heart can look at the Bible, figure out from it what God wants him to do, and then put that Bible understanding into practice. The good news is that if we just follow that simple plan for our lives, we pass the test! We end up with the sheep on the right hand of Christ. The bad news is that if we don't study our Bibles or we don't do what the word says, we fail the test. We end up with the condemned, with the goats on the left hand of the Lord Jesus.
- D. For those sheep on the right hand, the future is bright. **THE RIGHTEOUS WILL INHERIT THE KINGDOM**. Look at what Jesus says He will say to them in Matthew 25:34. There are two parts of this verse that are important. First of all is this idea of the righteous. Remember, the Biblical idea of righteousness is of having our lives conformed to the standard of God's word. None of us are righteous by ourselves. All of us have sinned at some point. However, the grace of Christ can make us righteous. He can justify us, that is, line us up with the standard of His word, through the power of His blood. He will do that if we obey Him in faith.
- E. Second of all, this verse talks about the righteous inheriting the kingdom of God. This means that because of the death of Jesus on the cross, we will inherit eternal life from Him. Even though we could never have earned the right to live in heaven on our own, we get to live in heaven forever because of Him.
- F. That's the happy part. We see the ominous part in God's promise that **THE WICKED WILL BE CAST OUT**. Jesus tells us about this in Matthew 25:41. If, on the day of judgment, we are found disobedient to the word of God, God will not allow us to remain in His presence, and He will exile us to eternal torment in hell. And folks, on our own, with only our pathetic attempts at righteousness to trust in, any of us will be found disobedient and condemned. We will spend eternity in a place where no light will ever come, a place where the worms never stop gnawing on us, a place where the fire will never stop burning us, a place where we will never again know the kindness and the blessing of God. I'm not making any of this up. I'm just repeating what God has told us. It is my solemn duty as a preacher of the gospel to warn all of you who are not right with the Lord that unless you get right with Him, you will surely spend eternity in that horrible place.
- G. However, I'm not going to invite anyone to do anything about it. I'm going to invite you to think about it. Hell is terrible, and it won't be improved by the knowledge that you could have obeyed the gospel but chose not to. It may be that you've already reached that point. It may be that the invitation that you heard last Sunday or last Wednesday was the last invitation you'll ever hear, because you're not going to hear one now.