Kingdom Life: Son of Man

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Daniel 7:13-14 13 "I [Daniel] saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
14 And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

Matthew 25:31-46 31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 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. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 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. 35 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, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, **as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'**

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

And to him was given dominion, and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him
– Daniel 7:14

Throughout Matthew Jesus has been warming up to this moment… and He could not be more clear in the 25 the chapter of Matthew! You are not the only one to cringe at this idea of God's Judgment. The idea that there are those who have been without Jesus in their lives and who will spend eternity without Jesus in their lives. The idea that there is such a thing as being dammed, blocked from the Kingdom Life. A life we, the church, take for granted.

This would not be the case for the peasants and nobility of the 16th Century. The Sistine chapel's alter took 4 years to complete (1535-39). Twenty-five years after the famous Sistine chapel ceiling depicting the desperation of human nature reaching to touch the finger of God. Perhaps less famous the wall directly behind the alter which would be what the parishioners, mostly nobility, would have been staring at during the masses conducted by Popes and Bishops for hundreds of years. And on that wall is the depiction of Jesus' return and this separation of humanity to the left of the painting and to the right.

The paining, with Christ and Mary in the center, depicts the resurrection of those who have died and their ascensions into the heavens. On the left they are welcomed by the saints. Dramatic scenes of relief and reunion. On the right those who have risen from the grave into the sky are falling or being drug down to he bottom right corner of the paining to the gates of Hell. And the expression and the struggle of these goats is vivid. It is very clear that you do not want to be one of these anguished souls on that day of Judgment. Interestingly enough Michelangelo modeled some of the faces on the right after his

greatest critiques and some powerful people being robbed of their earthly power. It is gruesome and striking.

What maybe even more surprising is this paining is not overdone. We know that Jesus, after several stories about the Kingdom and what it looks like to be, right now, living that Kingdom life… after all of these metaphors of the vineyard and the lost coins, and the wheat and the tears, … a couple mentions of weeping and gnashing teeth … Jesus has been building up to this moment. In His ministry and in the masterful way that the disciple Matthew remembers this moment when Jesus just flat our says it. There will be a day of Judgment and on that day the divisions of the World will be clearly displayed… and those who have Christ, those who have been saved will transition into eternity, BUT those who have blocked the work of the Holy Spirit through them will be damned to a self-fulfilling eternity of endless selfishness and independence from God. This Hell that Jesus describes most often and vividly as darkness, and a couple of times compared it to the burning garbage dump on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

So, for 2,000 years humanity greatest artists and writers… creatives, some of the most influential people have attempted to prepare humanity for this reality. I would give the Sistine chapel or Hieronymus Bosch(1482) - 6 out of 10. The left behind series a 2 out of 10. Scrouge and the Christmas Carol – 7 out of 10. I am not really sure if anyone has scored above a 7 on this difficult assignment. Best just to go back to the text and listen to what Jesus had to say. And I think you will find there something that stands out:

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry – Matthew 25:37

The sheep in this illustration that Jesus is using. The saved, the righteous … they can not recall when they did the things that God desired them to do.

This can not be overstated. When we get to heaven we will be shown by God all of the moment that he interrupted our schedule to do the mundane and the powerful things that pointed others to Christ. Something as small as a glass of water… to that off handed comment about your answered prayer that renewed a lost and distracted person's faith in God… You are right now doing and saying things you could not calculate or be prepared for that give the people in your life the courage to pray again for the first time. You have been and will continue to have the conversations that lead others to Baptism.

I don't know about you but I find that very surprising. That is not how I would logically imagine the Kingdom of God to work, much less how I have been intentionally preparing for my place in God's Kingdom here and now. If I am honest it isn't how I usually hope to be a part of that Kingdom when my final day comes.
I want to be able to point to my good works and sacrifices made through out my life. In my prayers I ask for the strength to set myself aside and do the right thing… At the same time, I pray for my daily bread. Lord, give me this day the compassion and presence that I have found it actually takes for me to set aside my schedule for the sake of those around me. Because, I am not very good at seeing or predicting all of the ways that you might use me in the life of others.

What I find is that there are two types of <u>obedience</u> wrestling with in me. There is that desire to prove myself and then there is that absence of self that actually makes me of use to my neighbor and the stranger I had not planned on bumping into.

And these to <u>obedience</u> can really be at odds with each other. I think my best contribution to my family and the work of God through me - my well laid plans, my intentionality… my study and preparation to do the right thing… Only to hear from God in this parable and throughout my day, say that my plans and initiative and good intentions can not possibly imagine what God is capable of doing through me. The happy coincidences of a heart that breaks for the needs of others.

Is my obedience intentional or accidental. And they are two different types of obedience. One is sticking to my goals, determination. The other is an openness, a freedom to go with my gut – rise to the occasion. Obey that still small voice.

Let me demonstrate this reality in another way. Through the immortal wisdom of the TV show Friends (Season 5, episode 4).
Phoebe and Joey get into a debate whether a truly selfless good deed can exist. ***Joey's Argument: Joey claims that all good deeds are inherently selfish because helping someone or doing something nice always makes the doer feel good in return. Phoebe's Stance: Phoebe initially insists that selfless deeds do exist, setting out on a mission to prove Joey wrong so she won't raise her future children in a cynical world.***

Letting a Bee Sting Her: Phoebe lets a bee sting her at the park, reasoning it is selfless because it hurts her and helps the bee look tough in front of its friends. Joey points out that honeybees die after stinging, meaning she likely killed it. Donating $200 to PBS: Phoebe strongly dislikes PBS due to a childhood grudge (she wrote to Sesame Street for comfort after her mother died and only received a keychain). She donates $200 of her own savings—money she was saving for an expensive hamster—to the station's telethon where Joey is volunteering

The twist comes when her donation gets Joey on TV and helps his acting career. The TV show leaves the debate unresolved.

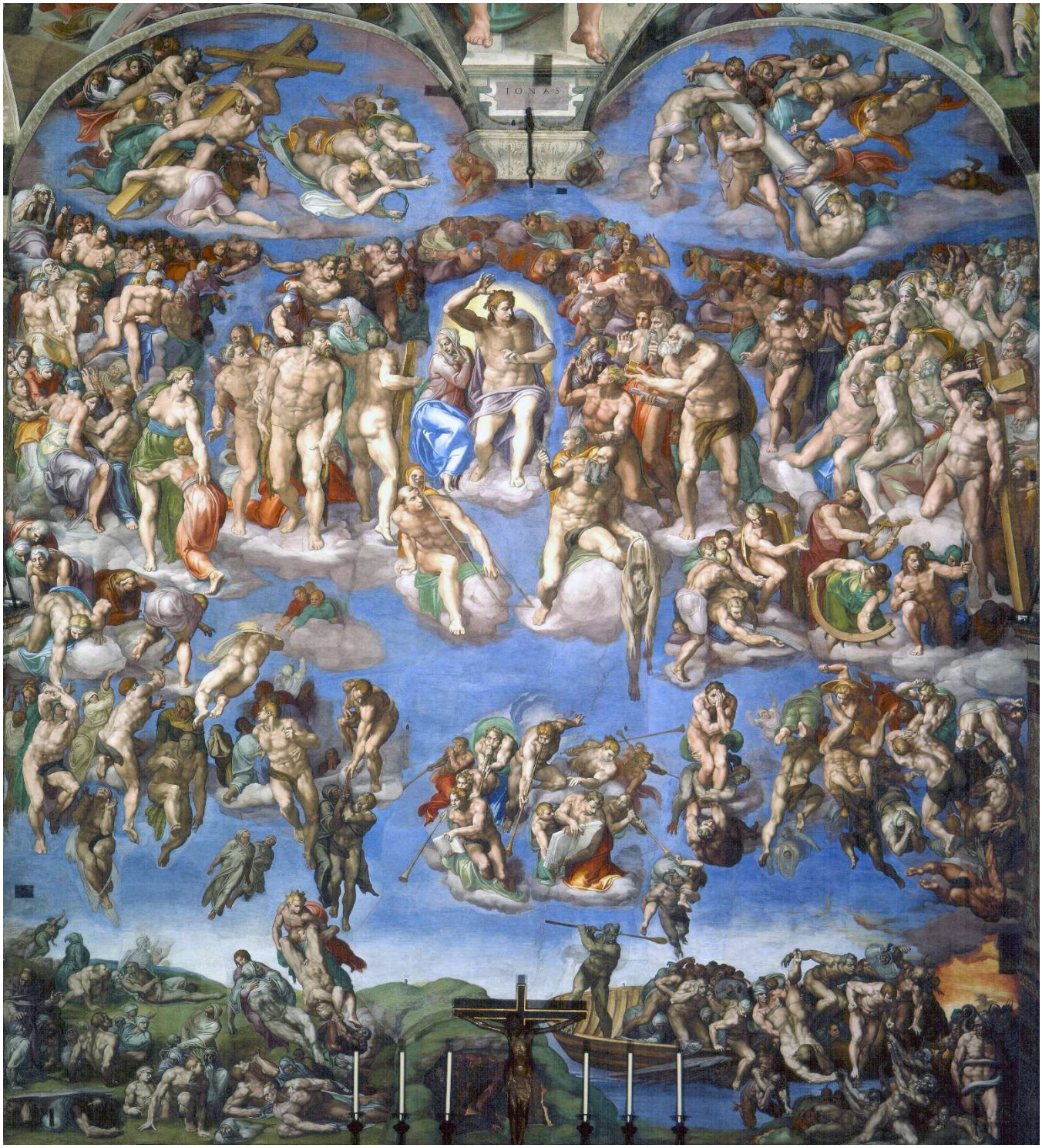
But the surprising answer from Luther to Paul the Apostle to this description of the final judgment by Jesus… You can not truly be aware of any of your selfless good deeds, because as soon as you acknowledge them it is your human nature to count them as your own righteousness. You have placed your faith in yourself and your ability to serve or please God

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry – Matthew 25:37

It turns out that our best work in this Kingdom Life are unknown to us. Our best obedience is obeying the interruption to our good intentions. Each moment God's Spirit has broken our hearts to be present with others saying and doing things that we may never see the proof of.

The only thing that can damn you for eternity is not a lack of good works, but a lack of Jesus. You have Jesus. You are a sheep of His flock, A lamb of his fold, a sinner of His redeeming.

And to him was given dominion, and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages [will] serve him
– Daniel 7:14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