

The end.

Every story has three things, a beginning, a middle and an end. And they are important. If you leave out one them, it completely changes the story doesn't it. I've been watching a good amount of Disney movies lately, if you leave out the last 15 minutes of most of those films they are completely different. The Lion King would still be scar. The beast and all of his household servants would be stuck under a curse while belle would be forced to marry Gaston to get Maurice out of prison, Anna it seems would remain frozen forever, while Erindale is stuck in an Eternal winter and Elsa would still be letting fear control her. And if you haven't seen those movies I think you can think of some other story that you have heard, where the end really put the whole story in perspective. Where the story ends matters. It changes how we feel about the beginning and the middle.

This Sunday is a Sunday where we are going to talk about the end- the end of this world's story. Knowing the end gives us perspective about the whole story. Knowing the end changes the story.

Our lesson for today is from Matthew chapter 25. If you read through chapter 24 of Matthew it's all about the end. Jesus let's us know about all of these events leading up to the end. The rising action before the conclusions, wars and rumors of wars, false prophets, people claiming to be the Messiah. Then he talks about how the time of the end is unknown, that the end is going to come suddenly and unexpectedly, so we should be prepared at all times for it. Chapter 25 continues that thought with the parable of the 10 virgins, five of whom were prepared and 5 who were not prepared. And the message is obvious, be prepared for you king to return. Because he will return. That happens at the end. And then the lesson of the talents, where a king gives his talents to different men, some invest the talents wisely, some do not. The ones who do are rewarded, the ones who don't are punished. Use what God has given to you because he will come back and hold you accountable for what you have done, that will happen at the end. The virgins if you are familiar with that parable are judged on whether or not they are prepared, the servants, in the parable of the ten talents are judged on whether or not they invested the gifts wisely. And now we get to the parable of the sheep and the goats. It is another judgement that takes place.

At the end of this world, there is judgement. There is a great and glorious court room scene. Jesus describes it for us today in our lesson. The son of man will return in glory and all the angels with him, and he will sit on his throne of glory. When a judge walks into a courtroom the bailiff says "All rise." The judge deserves honor and respect so we stand out of respect for him. That's just judge. When we are talking about the son of man, Jesus, returning with all glory and power, he deserves infinite praise and glory and honor for all that he has done.

There is no jury here, there are no lawyers, it is just Jesus and the judge and then standing before him being judged is all people, of all time, of all nations.

Think about that. Everyone, ever, all gathered together in one place. What a finale. Every man woman and child ever born, from the most famous, to the most infamous, kings and queens along with the homeless and the desolate, all from all walks of life in one place. The living alongside those whose souls have been reunited with a raised body. Everyone is together. And then the judge starts to separate them. To the right and to the left. Some over here others over there, like a shepherd separating sheep from goats. Why sheep and goats? Because they are different, its as plain as can be, this one is a sheep, that one is a goat. Obvious, no ambiguity to our judge, he can see which is which.

And then the judge tells us his judgement. He says to the sheep, 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.

That's the ending we want. That's the "and they lived happily ever after." But it's better than that. It's and lived forever in perfection in a perfect world. Since the beginning God has wanted to have this ending. He has wanted to give you the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the mansion that he has prepared for you, your inheritance from God who holds all riches. He says to the sheep here it is. I am giving this to you because

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.

And those on his right replied. I don't remember doing that. When did that happen. When did we see you hungry or thirsty or as a stranger, or sick, or in prison, and Jesus says whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

See those sheep didn't remember helping Jesus because, they weren't looking to help Jesus, they were looking to help out their fellow man. They were feeding the hungry or the thirsty, they were showing that they had love for their God by just showing love to their neighbor. We will come back to this in a minute.

Jesus then turns to those on his left and he says to them not come to me you who are blessed, but rather, depart from me you who are cursed. Not take the

inheritance created for you since the creation of the world, but go into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

And then Jesus gives the reasoning behind his judgement, its the opposite of the sheep, I was hungry and you didn't give me anything to eat and thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you didn't invite me in, I needed clothes and you didn't clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you didn't do anything to help me.

And they have the same response as the ones on Jesus right, "When did we see you like this?" It is the same question but it is coming from very different places. The ones of the left, are saying, If I would have known that was you Jesus I would have helped. If I would have known that God you wanted me to do this or that, I would have done it. But we never saw you Jesus. We only saw hungry, thirsty, sick.... needy people.

And then the end comes. The judgement has been spoken. He takes the righteous to eternal life and he sends the wicked to eternal punishment. That's the end of this world, this age. That's the end of terror attacks, that's the end of internet hacking, that's the end of corruption and disease, that's the end of death and fear. That is how this world comes to an end.

If you know, and now you do, how it ends. I think there is one thing that we can agree on. We want to make sure that we are on the right, that we are one of those sheep, and definitely not one of those goats. And at first glance looking at this we would say, alright well if I want to be on Jesus' right then we better feed every hungry person we see, have a free lemonde stand out in front of church, make sure we get a whole lot of clothing donations here this month, start doing more hospital visits, and start a prison ministry. Because that's what Jesus said, you did these things, therefore I am giving you eternal life! We gotta start carrying our weight around this church, if we don't start these things how can we be sure we are going to have eternal life.

These are all good things to do, they are things that our God wants us to do. Showing love and kindness to the poor and the weak and the lonely, yah that should be the way that we express our love. But the ones on Jesus' right, they didn't do those things to get on Jesus' good side. They did them because they were on Jesus good side. All of those good things just came naturally to them. They weren't looking to impress Jesus. They had been moved by the love that God had given them so they showed the love of God to others.

It was those on the left, the cursed, the damned, who said “If only we would have what to do, we could have saved ourselves.” It was those on the left that were still clinging to their works. If only they would have known what God wanted from them then they could have done it better.

We rarely realize how selfish we are. How much our sinful nature in us is just thriving. Sometimes we give just to get recognition. Sometimes we sacrifice, which on the surface looks to be for others, but really its only make our life better or make ourselves feel better. Giving offerings to support our church, rather than to thank our God. Volunteering at soup kitchen because it makes us really appreciate what we have or makes us feel good. To give to God is to be selfless.

For the unbeliever the end is terrifying. Knowing that on the last day an omniscient, or all knowing God, who demands perfection will grill you about everything you did or didn't do in your life. And that terror leads people to do many good things, to try and be the best possible people they can be. And everyone knows its coming. Everyone knows that is the end. Because the law of God is written on our hearts. We know what this whole life is leading up to- its judgement. And if you are unsure about how its going to end for you, its going to lead you to live your life in many different ways. Some try to make this their heaven, if the end of the story isn't great, well at least this middle was a lot of fun. Some dedicate their lives to being as good as they possibly can be, volunteering, serving, withholding happiness from themselves, just hoping that they will be able to do enough. Some try to just forget about God. Some try to prove there isn't a God.

But that's them. You know this is how it ends. You know that Jesus died on the cross to take away each and every one of your sins. You know that when you meet your God and are judged, its not going to be based on what you did or didn't do, but your life will be judged on what Jesus did for you, because you have faith in him. That's how this all ends for you. It ends with your Savior saying to you come with me, take your inheritance prepared for you since the beginning of the world.

No matter what your story is up to this point or until you stand in front of your God. No matter what evil characters are around us. No matter our setting, or the conflicts that we have in our lives. All of us who believe in Jesus as our one and only Savior will live happily ever after in heaven.

We need to keep that in perspective. Because the end is what matters most. The devil and the world are going to try and get you to forget that. They are going to try and get you focus on the here and now, the temporary rather than the eternal. But don't forget the end is coming. And for you who are loved by God and have the gift of faith. You will live with him happily ever after