

“Entrance Requirements”—Revelation 22:12-14

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Entrance Requirements”, is Revelation 22:12-14 → Jesus says: *“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing My recompense with Me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

There was a 92 year old man who died and found himself standing in a long line outside the pearly gates of heaven. As he approached the gates he saw a sign which read, “Entrance requirements: 1,000 points.” “No sweat!” he thought to himself since he had been a Christian his whole life.

Approaching the pearly gates St. Peter welcomed him and said, “Entrance requirements: 1,000 points.” The man confidently said, “Well, I attended worship faithfully my whole life, missing only in dire emergencies.”

“100 points,” said St. Peter.

“100 points? That’s worth a whole lot more than 100 points! Well, I served on the board of elders for 24 years,” said the man.

“50 points,” said Peter.

“50 points? That was even more work than regular worship attendance! I sang in the choir for 40 years.”

“50 points.”

“I taught Sunday School for 17 years.”

“100 points.”

The man listed off every activity related to his “religious” life that he could think of but it only left him with 650 points. Now he was really starting to sweat it out.

“Think! Think!” he said to himself. “There must be something else!” Finally, realizing that he had exhausted every avenue to meet the entrance requirements, he threw up his hands and said, “I’ve got nothing else but the grace of God in Jesus Christ.”

Peter replied, “1,000 points!”

I wonder how many people’s thoughts about heaven immediately gravitate toward their own works? If so, this is actually natural. The nature of human relationships is performance based at every turn. Whether it’s the customer or your boss at work, the teacher at school, the spouse or child in a family, or Yahweh Himself, every relationship

demands a particular performance or behavior. It is expected and, if not fulfilled, impacts the relationship in an adverse way. Behavior is so important that Ephesians 2:10 says: *We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, **which God prepared beforehand**, that we should walk in them.*

At the end of the revelation to the apostle John, Jesus speaks about the importance of this relationship with Him to enter heaven, even referring to behavior. He says in verse 12 of our text: *Behold, I am coming soon.* While this promise could be understood chronologically, producing an expectation of Jesus's return within in the very near future, it also continues the teaching of Jesus about His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming during His earthly ministry. He stressed the importance of being ready because He *is coming at an hour you do not expect.* (cf. Matthew 24:44) He also spoke about the quickness of His coming with His analogy in Matthew 24:27 → *As the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* Thus, His words also convey the truth that His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming will happen quickly when it does take place.

The promise of His coming again is accompanied by His *recompense . . . to repay each one for what he has done.* While you may readily apply this to the wicked deeds of unbelievers (cf. verse 15; Revelation 21:8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21), it also applies to the believers. As Lutherans this may be a hard saying since we stress the Scriptural

teaching of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly says it is *by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Your good works will not serve as “points” to get you into heaven. Yet, they are described in Scripture as involved with the entrance requirements somehow. What’s up with that?

Jesus even seemed to give this perspective when He spoke about His coming on the Last Day separating the sheep (i.e. believers in Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins) from the goats (i.e. those who do not believe in Jesus). He welcomed the believers on the basis of their deeds: *I was hungry and you gave Me food . . . thirsty and you gave Me drink . . . a stranger and you welcomed Me . . . naked and you clothed Me . . . sick and you visited Me . . . in prison and you came to Me.* Then He excluded the unbelievers for not doing the same things. Interestingly, both groups responded the same way: “When did we see You in these conditions and act this way?” He answered: “When you did (or did not do) *it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did* (or did not do) *it to Me.* (cf. Matthew 25:31-46)

Viewing this parable of Jesus as a way of motivating you to do good works of mercy and human care misses the full impact of what Jesus is saying. His reference to their works (or lack thereof) was to reveal their faith (or lack thereof). In other words, your faith (or lack of faith) will

**naturally** display itself in your deeds (or lack of deeds). Thus, when Jesus says in our text that He will *repay each one for what he has done*, it is because what you have done flows from your faith. This is why Galatians 5:22-23 describes the actions of a Christian as flowing naturally by the power of the Holy Spirit. In contrast the actions of unbelief, *the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law*. These are behaviors which flow as fruit of the Holy Spirit's working faith in your life.

Thus, it's not like you have to try to do good deeds so you'll have some "points" toward your entrance requirements for heaven. If this is your perspective, repent of your boastful heart and trust in the work of Jesus—His perfect life, sacrificial death and resurrection **for the forgiveness of your sins**. Such people are described in verse 14 of our text as *blessed*, describing them as having washed *their robes*. Revelation 7:14 says *they have washed their robes and made them white **in the blood of the Lamb***. It is the picture of being *clothed . . . with the garments of salvation* and *covered . . . with the robe of righteousness* (cf. Isaiah 61:10) by faith in Jesus Christ. This is what it means when Galatians 3:27 describes your baptism: *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ **have put on Christ***.

The requirements for entering *the city* of the heavenly Jerusalem *by the gates* and having *the right to the tree of life* (verse 14)—both pictures of living eternally in the presence of Jesus—are bound up in *the blood of Jesus* which *cleanses you from all sin* (cf. 1 John 1:7). Such cleansing through confession and absolution (i.e. repentance and forgiveness) not only places you in heaven but also places your actions toward others on a whole different plain. You desire to treat others with a genuine love and care for them **in Christ**—not because it benefits you somehow. You desire to reach out with human care and mercy because of God’s mercy, forgiveness and grace showered on a forgiven sinner such as yourself **in Christ**. You know that your works are good **only** because of who you are **in Christ**.

From beginning to end—from your inception into Jesus at your baptism to your reception by Jesus into heaven—in the daily confession of your sins with your daily absolution—it is faith in the Person & Work of Jesus, *the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end* (verse 13), which constitutes your entrance requirements for heaven. It is the Holy Spirit Who displays this faith in your daily life as you serve others to the glory of God! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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