

⁹ *“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.*

¹⁰ *A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.
Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
The court was seated,
and the books were opened. (Daniel 7:9-10)*

What will God Find in your Book?

Do you have a record? If you did, would you tell me? One summer when I was a kid, we went to a fireworks display at a golf course. My brother and I wanted to get closer so we began threading our way toward the place where they were launching the rockets. But somehow, I crossed the safety line and a cop on a motorcycle roared up and told me to go back. My brother was in summer school that year and the next day, one of the teachers saw me and she said, “I hear you got in trouble with the law!” I was mortified. I couldn’t believe my brother had told a teacher what happened. Of course, even though she knew about it, that didn’t give me a criminal record. But lots of people do have one. It might be something as simple as a traffic ticket, but the police track stuff like that. If you’ve done something serious, it’s in a computer database somewhere and it can come back to haunt you.

The word of God we have before us today reminds us of our records. Now, it doesn’t picture a database. It was written long before things like that were invented. It says, **“the books were opened.”** They probably would have looked more like scrolls to us, but the books were opened so that God could read our records. Daniel was seeing a vision of Judgment Day. God packs a great deal into these two short verses, but nothing here is more important to us personally than those books. My friends, when Judgment Day arrives, when you and I have to stand before him, **what will God find in your book?**

Daniel was a prophet. He was also a civil servant in the Babylonian Empire and then later in the Persian Empire. He was Jewish but as a young man he was deported to Babylon and put to work. God showed Daniel some of the most famous and complicated visions recorded in the Bible. Our text this morning is one of those visions. And it’s the nature of a vision that the details are usually symbolic but the general point is clear. For a man like Daniel who spent most of his life at court, the things he saw in this vision were familiar and yet they went way beyond anything he experienced.

The vision begins with thrones being set up. Even today, when you’re going to have a big, public appearance by a king, you have to set things up beforehand. Once those thrones were in place, **“the Ancient of Days took his seat.”** That’s God, right? But Daniel is the only person in the Bible who calls God that. My mom sometimes calls herself that when she’s joking about how old she is. But “the Ancient of days” means much more than just that God is old. Compared to us, he is certainly ancient. He was there when the world began. He watched all the thousands of years of human history roll by. But in another place, the Bible says that to him a thousand years is like a day and a day is like a thousand years. Time doesn’t affect God. He was there before the universe existed – presumably even before time began. He is so old that he has no beginning. He was always there. And he will always be there.

Now, when my mom jokes about being ancient of days, she doesn’t mean it as a compliment. She’s laughing at herself and the effects of old age. You’ve all heard the joke, “Getting’ old ain’t for sissies,” right? For us, being ancient implies losing your faculties. Someone in our congregation once told me that 80% of all

people over eighty years old have some degree of memory loss. You ache already when you get up in the morning. You can't react as fast as you used to. You look in the mirror and you see lines that didn't use to be there. When I get a haircut, I wonder where all that gray hair came from. For us, being ancient means losing our independence and even the respect of our society. But in ancient times, that wasn't true. Probably because it was so hard to live long enough to be ancient, the ancients revered the elderly. Old people knew how we got here. They were a treasure trove of counsel and advice in a scary and uncertain world. So when God reveals himself as the Ancient of Days, he's claiming the title of the eternal one, the one who truly knows all and has seen all and who alone has the wisdom to judge the world.

That's who sits on his throne. Daniel tells us, **"His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool."** White not because old age was winning, but white because he is holy. Daniel says, **"His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze."** In the Old Testament, fire is associated with God's glory. Here, God sits on a throne, not made of oak or cedar or even of gold. His throne is made of fire. He goes on to say that a river of fire flows out from him. It almost sounds like a volcano, doesn't it? God radiates his glory.

Daniel says, **"Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him."** Who are they? The angels. The Old Testament likes to call God "the Lord of hosts." A host is an army. God often pictures himself at the head of the armies of heaven. Thousands upon thousands, ten thousand times ten thousand angels stand in rank upon rank before God Almighty. This is Judgment Day. On that day Jesus will come with the hosts of heaven and he will send those angels to gather all people before him. The dead will rise and be carried along with the living to God's courtroom.

In the vision, once we all got there, Daniel saw, **"The court was seated, and the books were opened."** What books? God's records of our lives – the record of every moment we ever lived, of all that we have said and done and even all that we have thought and felt. If Daniel had lived in our age, God might have spoken of CD's and databases. Or he might have pictured movies on DVD's that showed our every move, that actually had a voiceover that included every thought that was ever going through our heads. So even when it looked like we were being nice, churchgoing boys and girls, but we were really more interested in the girl who just ran by the church or how the Lions are going to do this afternoon, that would show up on the recording.

So what will God find in your book? That's kind of a scary question, isn't it? I mean, would you want to play your whole life for us here in church this morning? Would you want us to hear your secret thoughts and desires? I'm guessing no – even though no one here is going to send you to jail. Certainly, no one here is going to send you to hell. But we wouldn't even want the shame of our secret sins and our sinful thoughts and desires coming out where people could see and hear them. How much less do we want that stuff played in God's courtroom on Judgment Day when eternity is on the line?

How many times does your day start with bickering with your kids or your parents or spouse? How many times don't you curse under your breath at other drivers or think how much you hate your boss or your teacher? Think how many times during any given day we complain about how much money we make or how bad our job is or how much we hate our house. Who are we criticizing but the God who gives us all those things? How many times don't we get into stupid conflicts with the people around us? How many people wouldn't love to tell us exactly what they think of us? How much hurt do we breeze past without even noticing? What is God going to find in our books?

What is the only verdict God could possibly reach for you and me? Not guilty. Yes, you heard me right. Not guilty. What is God going to find in your books? Nothing. At least, nothing sinful, nothing that you've ever done wrong. In fact, if God does play a movie of our lives on Judgment Day, you and I are likely to object and say that he put in the wrong DVD because we can remember all kinds of sins that just aren't there. Why not? Because the blood of Christ has already erased every one of those sins. God dipped the DVD of our lives in Jesus' blood and when he pulled it out, there was no sin left. He didn't just erase the big sins. He erased the sins in our minds and hearts. He erased the secret sins as well as the public ones. He erased the sinful desires we never acted on and the sinful thoughts we never spoke just like he erased all the sins we did commit. So what's left? Nothing of our lives. But God is not going to play a blank type. He's not going to say that there was no entry found by our names in his record. Instead, he's going to play the life of Jesus. He's going to show a DVD of Jesus being perfect every time we sinned. He's going to announce the perfect life of

Christ is the only entry next to our names. And God is going to find us innocent. He's going to find that all our sin is paid for and wiped away. He's going to find that we were perfect and admit us to eternal life.

In fact, the book of Revelation speaks of another book that God is going to open: the Book of Life. That book records the name of everyone who will get into heaven. Guess what? Your name and my name are going to be there. Why? Because of Jesus. And because of the Holy Spirit. He came to us in the simple message of forgiveness. For most of us, that happened when we were babies. We were baptized and he washed us clean and gave us faith. For some of us, it happened later, through the good news about Jesus that someone shared with us. But the Holy Spirit reached into our hearts and gave us trust in Jesus. Then in communion and in the spoken gospel message, God tells us again and again that we are forgiven. Through that message, he keeps our faith alive no matter what guilt we face here.

So on Judgment Day when God raises the dead and sends out that host of angels to gather all people who have ever lived and when Jesus separates the sheep and the goats, when he divides those who will live with him from those who will spend eternity in a hell, we will be on his right hand. We will go into the kingdom prepared for us since the creation of the world. We will be found holy and innocent in God's sight and we will enjoy eternity with him. And on that day of Judgment, we won't even have to watch the video of our actual sins. God has already forgotten them and we will forget them, too.

To me, that's one of the greatest blessings of the life to come. Sometimes, I torture myself with the memories of my own sin. I hate learning that I forgot to visit someone at the hospital or I hurt someone's feelings with a flippant comment that I made. Sometimes I can't sleep at night because I think of people who have left this church because I didn't serve them well enough. Sometimes, when my brain is in neutral, I remember terrible things I said to my parents or all the ways I failed my wife and my children or all the God given time I've wasted here without learning or doing the things I should have. Do you ever experience that? All that guilt is part of being a sinner in a sinful world. We all have our own set of terrible things we wish we could forget. Well, in heaven we will. When we rise from the dead, we will. There will be no guilt in heaven. On Judgment Day God will find us innocent and he will free our hearts from all the guilty feelings that torture us here.

He will also set us free from the sin that still leads us astray here. One of the great insights of the Lutheran Reformation is that we Christians are sinners and saints at the same time. God gave us a new man, a saint, who loves him and only does what is good. But we were born sinners who hate God and love to sin. Those two natures are at war. All too often, the sinner in us wins. Well, when we stand next to Jesus, that sinner will be gone. Only the saint will be left. We will never choose to sin again. No temptation will ever win again because we'll never want to sin again. It won't even look good to us anymore. God will give us all that because next to our name in his book he will find the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. That is our record. We are forgiven. We are holy. We belong to God. That is true now. And it will be true for all eternity. Amen.