

PREPARE TO MEET HIM

Matthew 25:31-46

SAC 20/6/2010

Many are asking questions about the world today. They see what is happening and they ask questions such as: "Where is it all heading?" "Where will it all end?"

The Bible answer is AT THE COMING OF CHRIST. The event that we celebrate at Christmas is the **first** coming of Christ into the world. It was a PIVOTAL POINT in history. But His second coming will mark the **end** of history. It will signal the end of human existence as we know it, but not the end of the human race. The significance of the event is indicated by the words of Verse 31 . . .

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

1. THE KING APPEARS v.31

One of the great problems we have whenever we read the Bible, is that we read into the Bible the ideas that we have picked up from elsewhere. The appearing of a king or queen means very little to most Australians. It seems that there are few dedicated monarchists in our nation today. In general, people are more likely to resent authority than to respect it. And this negative mood is found even among Christians. So when we learn that Jesus is going to come as King, we have to work hard to understand what it means.

The background to Mt 25 is the Old Testament, where the king was the final and absolute authority in his kingdom. In the ancient world he had the power of life and death over all his subjects. The arrival of a king was always a major event. For weeks and even months, people would be making preparations. Then one day the monarch would arrive, dressed in splendid robes, and attended by numerous servants. During his royal progress through the streets, the crowds would bow low in respect. At last, he would take his place on the throne overlaid with gold, and conduct the affairs of state.

When Jesus returns, the spectacle will be even more impressive. The title "*Son of Man*" (v.31) carried a wealth of meaning for the believing Jew. Ever since the prophet Daniel had referred to the coming of *the Son of Man* (Dan 7:13ff) the Jewish rabbis had fired people's imagination with the expectation of a mighty Deliverer. The One who was to come would exercise unlimited sovereignty over all His enemies, and vindicate His people. The religious teachers went well beyond the plain meaning of the Scriptures, and people expected a military or political solution to their problems. The majority could never think of Jesus of Nazareth as the expected Messiah. Phil 2:7-8 says of His first coming, life and death on earth: "*He took the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!*"

His **second coming** will be very different. The majestic Lord of all creation will be accompanied by "*all the angels*" (Mt 25:31). Anyone familiar with the Bible knows what **just one** of these heavenly messengers can do. e.g. **One angel** shut the lions' mouths when Daniel was thrown into their den. And **one angel** rescued his three friends from the blazing furnace that incinerated the soldiers who stood nearby (Dan.3:28 & 6:22). Even more spectacular was **one angel** who wiped out the all-powerful Assyrian army (2 Chron.32:21 Isa 37:31-38). Never underrate the power of an angel! And never imagine that this world is running out of God's control. The whole progress of history is moving unerringly and inevitably to this great event . . . **the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The vision in Mt 25 is one of majestic splendour, and irresistible power. In the history of our world, many have had the title of "King". Some have had the power that enabled them to reign over their subjects. But none has ever come near the authority and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is "*King of kings, and Lord of lords, and He shall reign for ever and ever*" (Rev 17:14). The Bible says (Mt 25:31) "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.*" The radiant glory of Christ will stop people in their tracks. They will be able to look at no one else. But there will also be that sense of overwhelming power, reinforced by the presence of the "*all the angels*" with Him. We have already considered what **one angel** can do. What number are we dealing with when the Bible says: "*all the angels*"?

Heb 1:22 speaks of "*thousands upon thousands of angels*". This is a typically Hebrew expression which means: "*countless armies of angels*". In other words, at the second coming of Christ there will be a demonstration of absolutely overwhelming power. All evil will be defeated, all opposition to Christ and His people will be finished. His coming will mark the end of all wrongdoing, injustice, and ungodly exploitation. When Jesus comes there will be no more character assassination, home invasions, or pack rape. Unrepentant drug traders, murderers, and terrorists will tremble before Him.

This is the day which the Christian longs for. The New Testament describes the people of God straining forward to catch a glimpse of their glorious King.(1Cor 1:7 1Thess 1:10 Tit 2:13 2Pet 3:12 Jude 21). His appearing will mark the end of their waiting, and their suffering. The second coming of the Lord Jesus will indicate the fulfilment of their salvation, and the granting of all that they hoped for. What will happen at that time ?

2. THE NATIONS ARE GATHERED vv.32-33

32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

There won't be a call for volunteers. It is not an invitation, but a royal summons....

"*All the nations WILL BE GATHERED before Him*". There will be no possibility of refusal. No one will miss out. We had no say in whether or not we were born. We have no say in whether or not we will die. And we have no say in whether or not we shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

This is a fact of the gospel that has sometimes been overlooked. With the great Creeds of the Christian Church we have declared the gospel truth for 1700 years. But do we believe it ?

Nicene Creed:-

"He ascended into heaven

And is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead"

Apostles' Creed:-

"He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;

from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

In presenting the gospel, Christians have explained the human need, how Christ has met that need, and that men and women should respond in repentance and faith. But there is a further truth. Those who do NOT believe the gospel are held accountable by God and will appear before Him for judgment. The gospel is not a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. As the apostle says in Acts 17:31 "*God commands all men everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness*" through Christ. We need to obey God's command and repent. It will be too late then.

The Judge will divide the human race into two groups by separating the people from one another. At that moment, it will be clear to everybody that there is a fundamental division in humanity. There are those who love God and those who do not.

3. THE VERDICT IS GIVEN vv.34-36 & 41-43

The coming of Christ will mark the end of human existence as we know it, but not the end of human life. God has created us to live for ever. The KIND of life that we'll have then is referred to in this passage. Now the idea of judgment is repulsive to many people. They resent the very idea of humanity being divided for eternity. Why ? Because they do not understand or accept the character of the Judge ! No other Judge has had the perfect character of **this** Judge. And no other judge has done anything like what He has done. The Bible says He left the perfection of heaven to come into this world of rotteness and sin.

He took the form of a servant

and became obedient to death

even death on a cross.

For what reason ? In order to give eternal life to sinners like you and me !

NOW is the day of opportunity. The gospel promise is held out to all people. It is for us to accept the gift of forgiveness and life. If we do not, we have no one to blame for the consequences. Those who reject and spurn the love of God will be assigned to eternal fire with the devil and his angels. Christ speaks to both groups....

THE SHEEP (on the right)

Come

You who are blessed

by my Father

*Take your inheritance -
the kingdom prepared for
you since the creation
of the world*

THE GOATS (on the left)

Depart from me

You who are cursed

*Into the eternal fire
prepared for the devil and his
angels*

There are countless ways of categorizing people. It happens all the time. In spite of all the best efforts (and the worst legislation), discrimination is a fact of life. We make a difference between one lot of people and another according to sex, race, colour, creed, politics, age, ability, background, health, education, wealth, and so on. Every day of our lives this exercise continues. But on the last day, there will be just one issue: our relationship with Jesus Christ. Are you sure of your relationship with Him? Now? It will be too late, then. How does Christ explain His judgment? How does He sum up the case? (vv.35-36 & 42-43). If religious people had been given the task the judgment might have been based on profession of faith, or church affiliation. Christ tells us He will judge according to what people have DONE.

4. OBJECTIONS ARE ANSWERED vv.37-40 & 44-46

Genuine, justifying faith necessarily demonstrates itself in what the believer DOES.

Faith is shown by works, otherwise it is dead (Jas 2;14-18). The treatment of those whom Christ calls "*the LEAST of these brothers of mine*", is the accurate indicator of the worth of our religion. Christ is not phased by the up-front figures in the church. He knows and loves the insignificant Christian: the believer who feels inadequate. When Christians are fussing over likeable personalities and popular figures, Jesus' love goes out to the blind beggar, the bereaved widow, and the terminally ill. The words of Matthew 25 are a necessary reminder of a great principle. Such is the solidarity between Christ and His people, that what you do to "the LEAST" of them, you do to HIM!

When Paul had been persecuting the Christians, the Lord appeared to him and said: "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute ME?*" (Ac 9;1-5). In speaking to Christians about their attitudes to one another in the church, the apostle explains that God has put each one there to be valued and honoured (1 Cor.12:21-25). Well how are we going?

If Christ were to come today and judge us according to our treatment of one another, how would we fare?

THERE IS ONE EVENT THAT WILL INVOLVE EVERY ONE OF US.

ARE WE READY?

IT WILL BE TOO LATE TO SETTLE OUR ACCOUNTS THEN.

5. DISCIPLES COMMISSIONED

Jesus had been speaking to the disciples and expected them to act on what He said.

Perhaps there is someone here today who has never made their peace with God through faith in Jesus. You need to do it now. Come and speak to me or one of the staff. God wants you to have eternal life, and be sure about it. The Bible says: "*It is appointed to men to die once. After that comes judgment.*" (Heb.9:27) "*NOW is the accepted time. Behold, NOW is the day of salvation.*" (2 Cor.6:2)

On the other hand, you may have been a complacent Christian. Perhaps you thought that the big issue was your relationship with Christ: one-to-one. HE says that unless you are concerned that your relationship with other Christians is right, you are not right WITH HIM. In this case, the lesser includes the greater. Christ deliberately challenges us about our attitude to the least significant Christian... the one who we might consider to be the least important in the church. Christ claims our lives, our abilities, our money, and our time. Once, we used all these to please ourselves. Now, we can use them to honour Christ and serve His brothers and sisters. even the least of them until He comes.
