



MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Comfort in Forewarning

Shortly before He led His disciples to the Mount of Olives for the last time, Christ detailed the very difficult future that lay ahead of each one of them. He did this not to be dour, but to give His disciples courage.

John 14:29, "And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass, you may believe."

There is something incredibly comforting and encouraging about knowing what is going to happen before it actually does. For example, if you face back surgery the doctor will show you models of your spine and then he will explain exactly what he was going to do in the surgery, how you will be put under, how long you'll be under, and what will happen when you awake. And if you are like me, this will help your face the surgery without the shock of surprise.

Brothers and sisters, there is a *great event* that awaits each of us and Scripture describes it as the Last or Final Judgment. At this Judgment Day we will personally stand before the great "I Am" and render

account for all that we have said and done in our lives (Matthew 12:36; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Now I don't know about you, but this is an awesome truth! And that no doubt is why God has given us in Scripture enough of a description of this day that when it come to pass, we might be ready!

What does God's word teach about the Final Judgment? After His disciples asked Him about the end times and describing the tribulation that would precede the Last Day, Christ said this:

Matthew 24:29-31, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky [in the words of Hendriksen, 'Until this prophetic panorama becomes history we shall probably not know how much of this description must be taken literally and how much figuratively.' (Hendriksen 1982, 863) Regardless, clearly the Last Day will be a terrifying and shocking moment as this fallen world finally is addressed by God!], and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn [which would include some calling upon the rocks and hills to fall on them, Revelation 6:16], and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."-

On the day of Christ's return to this earth, the dead will first be raised from their graves and rejoined with their souls; both the lost (Matthew 13:41) and the elect (Matthew 24:31)! What an incredible day this will be! Accordingly in the here and now, we must be vigilant every time we see or hear of a sign of the time! As a labor pain, it must wake us up and prepare us to meet the Lord, which is why from here Christ

1. Told the parable of the Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32-33) and then
2. Used it to illustrate the importance of "watching" for this day (Matthew 24:34-41).

In fact, the climax of this call is found in Matthew 24:42-44.

Matthew 24:42-44, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He* will."

This corresponds with the teaching we saw from Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5. How important it is that we not live with our heads buried in the sand, but at every rumbling of this world telling us that Christ is coming, we clear our minds in anticipation of our Lord. To insure that we do this, Christ exhorted us further unto this end and encouraged us with the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) and Talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

How many times does Christ warn us here to be ready or watchful? How would the Lord have us to live? The idea behind watchful is NOT that we are to be prognosticators, but ones who respond to the signs we see. For example, if you seek directions and a person tells you to drive down the highway until you see a sign which reads, "Stop! Road Closed" and then take a left on a road which will get you to a highway that goes over the gully. To be "watchful" for the "road closed" sign would not be to endeavor to predict

when it would come, but to respond to the sign when you saw it.

This is how we are to respond to the many “signs of the times” which are daily evident before us. We are not to endeavor to predict the Second Coming of Christ, but wake up and live in light of eternity! Now, in light of the exhortation, Christ described the events of the Final Judgment.

Matthew 25:31-33, “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.”

This is the Last Judgment! At this time, ALL mankind is going to stand before God and be judged for what they have been or done. When Christ spoke to His soon to be persecuted disciples He said this:

Matthew 10:26, “Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

In other words, all that a man does, all of it will someday be revealed. For all will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ! Peter speaking of the non-believer said this:

1 Peter 4:4-5, “And in *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign *you*; but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

So indeed, the non-believer is going to stand before Christ’s throne and give an account. But what about the believer, will he be spared? Paul addresses this question, speaking to believers:

1 Corinthians 4:4-5a, “For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men’s* hearts...”

All of us are going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ where a judgment will be rendered concerning us on account of what we have done or not done. Following or during this judgment, a great separating/sorting will take place in which Christ will put the saved on his right and the unsaved on his left. And then we read this:

Matthew 25:34-46, “Then the King will say to those on His right [those saved], ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [Remember this statement: it was the Kingdom of God that was toppled when Adam and Eve rebelled, and it is this Kingdom that will be established at the last day! Now on what basis were the sheep identified as sheep?] For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see

You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.’ [this fits so perfectly against the warp and woof of Scripture: what is the first act of apostasy in any organized people of God? When they fail to attend to the needs of the body! // With this, Christ then will turn to the unsaved...] Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels [once again, notice that which made these damned individuals goats...]; for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves 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 take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

All of what we have just read is what is meant when we discuss the Final Judgment. From this, notice that the Final Judgment is the time when all mankind that has ever lived or will ever live will be gathered together before God’s great Throne of Judgment. Here they will be separated into two groups: The children of God and the children of Satan. Now, those who stand before God on the basis of Christ’s merits will receive this incredible declaration:

Matthew 25:34, “...Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

But those who rejected the Messiah and chose rather to stand before God on the basis of their own merits will receive these awful words:

Matthew 25:41, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.”

And yet, as awesome as this may seem, there’s more. For, THE BASIS upon which all will be judged in that day is not what was professed but how one lived! After proclaiming His approval of the sheep Christ says this:

Matthew 25:35-36, “For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”

After declaring the fate of the rebellious Christ once again gives the reason why.

Matthew 25:42-43, “For [this is how I know you are goats...] I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.”

Truly, the Final Judgment will have our conduct as its focus; it will be based on our deeds *which is in perfect keeping with the rest of Scripture!*

Matthew 12:36-37, “And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”

2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

This is also why the Westminster Confession reads this way:

God hath appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil. (Westminster Assembly 1646, 33:1)

You say, “Wait a minute. I thought salvation was based upon Christ- not my works.”

This is correct! Salvation is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. The Final Judgment will be based on our conduct because the salvation that Christ grants is NOT just a theoretical deliverance from sin, BUT a real transferring of the believer out of the kingdom of darkness into Christ’s marvelous light. Another way of saying it is this way; while most make a distinction between theology and practice, the Bible makes no such distinction. What you do is the greatest declaration of your theology. And thus, the Final Judgment will be based on our works not because our works are the ground of our salvation, but because our works are the evidence of our salvation!

Titus 1:16, “They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*...”

Now before we go on, I want to address a fear that no doubt most of us are battling with this very moment. The temptation from this text is to focus on what we have or have not done for the Lord. For example:

- Am I good enough?
- Have I done enough?
- Am I righteous enough to be saved?

All of these are the wrong questions and reflect a heart that doesn’t understand the doctrine of the Last Judgment! While on the surface the questions sounds right; after all, salvation is not by a faith that is alone. Yet the truth of the matter is that there were many Pharisees¹ in Christ’s day whose lives were morally superior to our own (cf. Romans 2:17-21) who could answer the questions in the affirmative, and yet they clearly were NOT saved (cf. Romans 2:4-5; Matthew 23)!

While it is true that the fruit of our lives is the gauge to the genuineness of our faith; to correct a false faith one cannot focus on the fruit, but the foundation upon which it is resting! Knowledge of the Last Judgment should drive us to a greater belief and dependence upon Christ!

John 14:29, “And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass, you may believe.”

John tells us the “end” of much of God’s redemptive work:

John 20:31, “These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Think of it in these terms; when one fights cancer you shouldn’t address its symptoms, you must get to the root problem and attempt to rid the body of the cancer. How does that work when it comes to a faulty faith? If you suspect that your faith is not genuine or that there are holes in your faith, don’t focus on what you are or are not doing, but determine where your faith rests! Does it rest on Christ alone as the basis upon which you stand before God? If it does, then praise God! Over time, more and more fruit will appear! Or does it rest on yourself; your own effort? If your faith is resting on Christ, one of the primary effects of your faith will not first be moral blamelessness, but first and foremost mourning over your sinfulness.

Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

Matthew 5:3-4, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Speaking of the prostitute mourning and weeping at His feet, Christ said this:

Luke 7:47, “...her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much...”-

And how do we know she loved much? Because as a broken and crushed individual, she washed Christ’s feet with her hair (e.g., Luke 7:38)! This is the soil from which the fruit of the Spirit arises!

End Note

¹ Moved by the fear of the Last Judgment- which is an important doctrine and theme of the Old Testament!

Sources Cited

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 23, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.