

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

24:29-35

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

In this part of our Lord's prophecy he describes his own second coming to judge the world. This, at all events, seems the natural meaning of the passage: to take any lower view appears to be a violent straining of Scripture language. If the solemn words here used mean nothing more than the coming of the Roman armies to Jerusalem, we may explain away anything in the Bible. The event here described is one of far greater moment than the march of an earthly army; it is nothing less than the closing act of the present dispensation—the second personal advent of Jesus Christ. These verses teach us in the first place that when the Lord Jesus returns to this world he shall come with peculiar glory and majesty. He shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. Before his presence the very sun, moon and stars shall be darkened, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken. The second personal coming of Christ shall be as different as possible from the first. He came the first time as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was born in the manger of Bethlehem, in lowliness and humiliation; he took on him the form of a servant, and was despised and rejected of men; he was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, condemned by an unjust judgment, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns and at last crucified between two thieves. He shall come the second time as the King of all the earth, with royal majesty: the princes and great men of this world shall themselves stand before his throne to receive an eternal sentence: before him every mouth shall be stopped, and every knee bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. May we all remember this! Whatever ungodly men may do now, there will be no scoffing, no jesting at Christ, no infidelity at the last day. The servants of Jesus may well wait patiently: their Master shall one day be acknowledged King of kings by all the world. These verses teach us in the second place that when Christ returns to this world he will first take care of his believing people. He shall send his angels and gather together his elect. When Christ returns in glory and the judgment begins, true Christians shall be perfectly safe. Not a hair of their heads shall fall to the ground: not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall be broken. There was an ark for Noah in the day of the flood; there was a Zoar for Lot, when Sodom was destroyed; there shall be a hiding place for all believers in Jesus, when the wrath of God at last bursts on this wicked world. Those mighty angels who rejoiced in heaven when each sinner repented, shall gladly catch up the people of Christ to meet their Lord in the air. The day of Christ's second advent no doubt will be an awful day, but believers may look forward to it without fear. When Christ returns in glory, true Christians shall at length be gathered together. The saints of every age and every tongue shall be assembled out of every land: all shall be there from righteous Abel down to the last soul that is converted to God, from the oldest patriarch down to a little infant that just breathed and died. Let us think what a happy gathering that will be,

when all the family of God are at length together. If it has been pleasant to meet one or two saints occasionally on earth, how much more pleasant will it be to meet a multitude that no one can number! Surely we may be content to carry the cross, and to put up with partings for a few years. We travel on towards a day when we shall meet to part no more. These verses teach us in the third place that until Christ returns to this earth the Jews will always remain a separate people. Our Lord tells us, "This generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled." The continued existence of the Jews as a distinct nation is undeniably a great miracle: it is one of those evidences of the truth of the Bible which the infidel can never overthrow. Without a land, without a king, without a government, scattered and dispersed over the world for 1800 years, the Jews are never absorbed among the people of the countries where they live, like Frenchmen, Englishmen and Germans, but dwell alone (i.e. Numbers 23:9). Nothing can account for this but the finger of God. The Jewish nation stands before the world a crushing answer to infidelity, and a living book of evidence that the Bible is true. But we ought not to regard the Jews only as witnesses of the truth of Scripture; we should see in them a continual pledge that the Lord Jesus is coming again one day. Like the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they witness to the reality of the second advent as well as of the first. Let us remember this. Let us see in every wandering Jew a proof that the Bible is true, and that Christ will one day return. Finally these verses teach us that our Lord's predictions will certainly be fulfilled: He says, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away." Our Lord knew well the natural unbelief of human nature. He knew that scoffers would arise in the last days saying, "Where is this promise of his coming?" (i.e. 2 Peter 3:4). He knew that when he came, faith would be rare on the earth. He foresaw how many would contemptuously reject the solemn predictions he had just been delivering, as improbable, unlikely and absurd. He warns us against such skeptical thoughts, with a caution of particular solemnity: he tells us that, whatever man may say or think, his words shall be fulfilled in their season, and shall not pass away unaccomplished. May we all lay to heart his warning! We live in an unbelieving age. Few believed the report of our Lord's first coming, and few believe the report of his second. (Isa. 53:1) Let us beware of this infection, and believe to the saving of our souls. We are not reading cunningly devised fables but deep and momentous truths: may God give us a heart to believe them!

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