

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

24:36-51

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

There are verses in this passage which are often much misapplied. The coming of the Son of Man is frequently spoken of as being the same thing as death; the texts which describe the uncertainty of his coming are used in epitaphs, and thought suitable to the tomb. But there is no solid ground for such an application of this passage. Death is one thing, and the coming of the Son of Man is quite another. The subject of these verses is not death, but the second advent of Jesus Christ. Let us remember this. It is a serious thing to wrest Scripture and use it in any but its true meaning. The first thing that demands our attention in these verses is the awful account that they give of the state of the world when the Lord Jesus comes again. The world will not be converted when Christ returns: it will be found in the same condition that it was in the day of the flood. When the flood came, men were found eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, absorbed in their worldly pursuits and utterly regardless of Noah's repeated warnings. They saw no likelihood of a flood; they would not believe there was any danger. But at last the flood came suddenly and took them all away. All that were not with Noah in the ark were drowned: they were all swept away to their last account, unpardoned, unconverted and unprepared to meet God. And our Lord says, "So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." Let us mark this text, and store it up in our minds. There are many strange opinions current on this subject, even among good men. Let us not flatter ourselves that the heathen will all be converted and the earth filled with the knowledge of God before the Lord comes; let us not dream that the end of all things cannot be at hand because there is yet much wickedness both in the church and in the world. Such views receive a flat contradiction in the passage now before us: the days of Noah are the true type of the days when Christ shall return. Millions of professing Christians will be found thoughtless, unbelieving, godless, Christless, worldly and unfit to meet their Judge. Let us take care heed that we are not found amongst them. The second thing that demands our attention is the awful separation that will take place when the Lord Jesus comes again. We read twice over that "one will be taken and the other left." The godly and the ungodly at present are mingled together; in the congregation and in the place of worship, in the city and in the field, the children of God and the children of the world are all side by side; but it shall not be so always. In the day of our Lord's return, there shall at length be a complete division. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, each party will be separated from the other forevermore. Wives shall be separated from husbands, parents from children, brothers from sisters, masters from servants, preachers from hearers. There shall be no time for repentance or a change of mind when the Lord appears: all shall be taken as they are, and reap according as they have sown. Believers will be caught up to glory, honor and eternal life; unbelievers shall be left behind to shame and

everlasting contempt. Blest and happy are they who are of one heart in following Christ! Their union alone shall never be broken: it shall last for evermore. Who can describe the happiness of those who are taken when the Lord returns? Who can imagine the misery of those who are left behind? May we think on these things, and consider our ways! The last thing that demands our attention in these verses is the practical duty of watchfulness in the prospect of Christ's second coming. « Watch, » says our Lord, « for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. » Be ye , for in such an hour ye think not the Son of Man cometh. This is a point which our blessed Master frequently presses upon our notice: we hardly ever find him dwelling on the second advent without adding an injunction to « watch. » He knows the sleepiness of our nature; he knows how soon we forget the most solemn subjects in religion; he knows how unceasingly Satan labors to obscure the glorious doctrine of his coming again. He arms us with heart seaching exhortations keep awake, if we would not be ruined forevermore. May we all have an ear to hear them! True Christians ought to live like watchmen. The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night: they should strive to be always on their guard; they should behave like the sentinel of an army in an enemy's land, they should resolve by God's grace not to sleep at their post. That text of St. Paul's deserves many a thought: « Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober. » (1 Thessalonians 5:6). True Christians ought to live like good servants whose master is not at home. They should strive to be always ready for their Master's return: they should never give way to the feeling, « My Lord delayeth his coming. » They should seek to keep their hearts in such a frame that whenever Christ appears they may at once give him a warm and loving reception. There is a vast depth in the saying, « Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. » We may well doubt whether we are true believers in Jesus if we are not ready at any time to have our faith changed into sight. Let us close the chapter with solemn feelings. The things we have just been reading call loudly for great searchings of heart. Let us seek to make sure that we are in Christ, and we shall have an ark of safety when the day of wrath breaks on the world; let us try so to live that we may be pronounced « blessed » at the last, and not cast off forevermore. Not least, let us dismiss from our minds the common idea that unfulfilled prophecy is a speculative and not a practical thing: if the things we have been considering are not practical, there is no such thing as practical religion at all. Well might St. John say everyman who hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure » (1 John 3:3).

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