

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

25:31-46

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

In these verses our Lord Jesus Christ describes the judgment day, and some of its leading circumstances. There are few passages in the whole Bible more solemn and heart-seaching than this. May we read it with the deep and serious attention which it deserves. Let us mark in the first place who will be the judge in the last day. We read that it will be *the Son of Man* — Jesus Christ himself. That same Jesus who was born in the manger of Bethlehem and took upon him the very form of a servant; who was despised and rejected of men and often had not where to lay his head; who was condemned by the princes of this world, beaten, scourged and nailed to the cross — that same Jesus shall himself judge the world when he comes in his glory. To him The Father hath committed all judgment. (i.e. John 5:22). To him at last every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord (i.e. Philippians 2:10-11). Let believers think of this and take comfort. He that sits upon the throne in that great and dreadful day will be their Saviour, their Shepherd, their High Priest, their elder Brother, their Friend. When they see him they will have no cause to be alarmed. Let unconverted people think of this and be afraid. Their judge will be that very Christ whose Gospel they now despise, and whose gracious invitations they refuse to hear. How great will be their confusion at last if they go on in unbelief and die in their sins! To be condemned in the day of judgment by anyone would be awful; but to be condemned by him who would have saved them will be awful indeed. Well may the psalmist say, *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry* (i.e. Psalm 2:12). Let us mark in the second place who will be judged on the last day. We read that before Christ shall be gathered all the nations. All that have ever lived shall one day give account of themselves at the bar of Christ: all must obey the summons of the great King and come forward to receive their sentence. Those who would not come to worship Christ on earth will find they must come to his great assize when he returns to judge the world. All that are judged will be divided into two great classes. There will no longer be any distinction between kings and subjects, or masters and servants, or dissenters and churchmen; there will be no mention of ranks and denominations, for the former things will have passed away. Grace or no grace, conversion or unconversion, faith or no faith will be the only distinction at the last day. All that are found in Christ will be placed among the sheep *on his right hand*; all that are not found in Christ will be placed among the goats *on the left*. Well says Sherlock : *Our separations will avail us nothing, unless we take care to be found in the number of Christ's sheep, when he comes to judgment*. Let us mark in the third place in what manner the judgment will be conducted on the last day. We read of several striking particulars on this point: let us see what they are. The last judgment will be a judgment according to evidence . The works of men are the witnesses which will be brought forward, and above all their works of charity. The question to be

ascertained will not merely be what we said, but what we did: not merely what we professed, but what we practiced. Our works unquestionably will not justify us: we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law; but the truth of our faith will be tested by our lives. **â€œFaith which hath not works is dead being alone.â€** (i» James 2:17). The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring joy to all true believers. They will hear those precious words, **â€œCome, ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom;â€** they will be owned and confessed by their Master before his Father and the holy angels; they shall find that the wages he gives to his faithful servants are nothing less than a **â€œkingdom.â€** The least, lowest and poorest of the family of God shall have a crown of glory and be a king! The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring confusion on all unconverted people. They will hear those awful words, **â€œDepart ye cursed into everlasting fire.â€** They will be disowned by the great head of the church before the assembled world: they will find that as they **â€œsow to the flesh so of the flesh they must reap corruption.â€** (i» Galatians 6:8). They would not hear Christ when he said, **â€œCome unto me Ē† and I will give you restâ€** and now they must hear him say, **â€œDepart into everlasting fire:â€** they would not carry his cross, and so they can have no place in his kingdom. The last judgment will be a judgment that will strikingly bring out the characters both of the lost and saved. They on the right hand, who are Christâ€™s sheep, will still be **â€œclothed with humilityâ€**. (i» 1 Peter 5:5): they will marvel to hear any work of theirs brought forward and commended. They on the left hand, who are not Christâ€™s, will still be blind and self-righteous. They will not be sensible of any neglect of Christ: **â€œLord,â€** they say, **â€œwhen saw we thee and did not minister unto thee?â€** Let this thought sink down into our hearts. Characters on earth will prove an everlasting possession in the world to come: with the same heart that men die, with that heart they will rise again. Let us mark in the last place what will be the final results of the judgment day. We are told this in words that ought never to be forgotten: **â€œthe wicked shall go away to everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.â€** The state of things after the judgment is changeless and without end. The misery of the lost and the blessedness of the saved are both alike forever: let no man deceive us on this point. It is clearly revealed in Scripture: the eternity of God, and heaven and hell all stand on the same foundation. As surely as God is eternal, so surely is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day. Who shall describe the blessedness of eternal life? It passes the power of man to conceive: it can only be measured by contrast and comparison. An eternal rest, after warfare and conflict; the eternal company of saints, after buffeting with an evil world; an eternally glorious and painless body, after struggling with weakness and infirmity; an eternal sight of Jesus face to face, after only hearing and believingâ€”all this is blessedness indeed. And yet the half of it remains untold. Who shall describe the misery of eternal punishment? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of body; the eternal sting of an accusing conscience; the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels; the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised; the eternal prospect of a weary hopeless future all this is misery indeed. It is enough to make our ears tingle, and our blood run cold. And yet this picture is nothing compared to the reality. Let us close these verses with serious self-inquiry. Let us ask ourselves on which side of Christ we are likely to be at the last day. Shall we be on the right hand , or shall we be on the left? Happy is he who never rests till he can give a satisfactory answer to this question.

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