

# Matthew 25:31-46

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[ 0 : 00 ] We've seen, as we've journeyed through Matthew Gospel, we've seen Jesus making promises. I remember he said, Judas, you're going to betray me, and he did.

! He said to Peter, you're going to deny me, and he said he'd be arrested, he said he'd be crucified, he said he'd rise, he said the Spirit would come, he said Jerusalem would fall, and that his people would be persecuted, and so on, and so on.

The promises of Jesus are all wonderfully fulfilled, but there was one promise, the promise that he made most often, that still waits to be fulfilled, that's his return.

That he has promised to return in a personal way, and yes, it will be Jesus, the same Jesus who walked the streets, who raised the dead, and preached to the crowds, that Jesus will come.

He says it will be global, that every eye will see him. It will be sudden. We don't know when that will be, but it is expected, because he has told us, and it will be wonderful, because it will be full salvation, it will be the raising of our bodies, it will be the homecoming of his people.

[ 1 : 14 ] And it will be terrible, and it will be terrible, it will be terrible, because so many people have turned their back on him, and they will realise with unbelievable regret the decision they've made.

So what has this promise done? What has this promise of Jesus' return, what has it done? Think for example, Jesus says in John 14, I've gone to my father's house, there's many rooms, and I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again, and I will take you to be with me.

What has that done for the world? Well, I want to say it's done good for 2,000 years, because believers have trusted, and hoped, and waited, and served, and sacrificed, and rejoiced, and been expectant, and have impacted the world.

It's a very wise and wonderful thing that Jesus has done, in telling us that he would return. And it's had a great effect on the world, but it gets forgotten.

It gets forgotten because you and I hear a million messages that are not from the Bible, and they tell us that we are here for ourselves, and that we are here forever.

[ 2 : 30 ] And that all our problems can be solved, and we may as well just relax and enjoy ourselves and live to 90 or 100, to have a long, easy life. However, Jesus says he may interrupt that at any time.

And so when we put our faith in science and in medicine, to give us long, easy lives, we need to remember that science and medicine are limited. And so this morning, I want us to think really carefully about this promise that Jesus has made.

That he will come again at any time, and he will change what we're expecting for good or for else. So three points, okay? Number one, the coming certainty.

And number two, the surprising criteria by which he will assess us. And number three, the massive consequences. So first of all, the coming certainty.

Jesus is about to be arrested and crucified. And in these last chapters, in Matthew 24 and 25, he does a lot of teaching on being ready.

[ 3 : 34 ] And a number of times, he says there's going to be quite a long delay between his leaving and his arriving. I don't know whether you picked that up. So in 24-48, and in 25-5, and in 25-19, he actually says that there's going to be a long delay.

Now, remember when you were in school, and the teacher said, I'm going out of the room. What does the teacher say? He says, I'm going out of the room, and I will be back at any time.

Because the wise teacher knows, if he says, I'm going out of the room, and I will be back in 15 minutes, the wise teacher knows that the kids will play up, won't they? Until 14 minutes, 55 seconds.

And then they'll get around. And so Jesus says, doesn't he, I will be back at any time. 25 verse 31, just look there, it says, when the Son of Man comes.

And Jesus is describing himself as the Son of Man, as he often did. And notice he says, when he comes, not if I come, but when I come. Then he says, he will separate, or sift, and it will be Jesus who comes, the Son of Man.

[ 4 : 46 ] And it's going to be cosmic, we read in verse 31. There will be great glory. There will be angels, which is just remarkable, and supernatural. It will be majestic, because he will sit on a throne.

It will be miraculous, because all the nations will stand before him. It will be authoritative, because he will separate the two groups. And I think it's very, very difficult for you and I to imagine the scale of this.

That it's both cosmic and global. Notice there will be one throne. There won't be a throne for Allah, and another throne for Buddha.

There will just be the one king on the one throne. And though other religions teach that there will be many paths, according to Jesus, who is the one who knows the future, there is only one path to one throne, and everyone will gather before him, all the nations.

Everyone who's ever been conceived. People who've lived to 100, and people who died in the womb. People who've died naturally or unnaturally.

[ 6 : 00 ] People who have died as martyrs in the flames. People who've been lost at sea or lost in battle. People who were exterminated in the gas chambers. And people who died peacefully in bed.

Every single person who has been conceived, says Jesus will stand before him. Everyone who's been on the telly. Everyone who's been in the movies.

Everyone who's been in the history books. Everyone who's walked this earth will stand before Jesus and praise Jesus. And praise God.

That the person who will do the judgment is perfect in compassion, perfect in justice, perfect in wisdom. And this courtroom that Jesus conducts is going to be done so well with such compassion and such wisdom that there will be complete silence at the end and there'll be no objections.

And we're told in Revelation chapter 4, the hallelujahs will go up at the judgment. And the whole universe will say, you've done this brilliantly.

[ 7 : 09 ] We've no objections. We've no complaints. And that is how Jesus describes his return. And you'll see that there are two possible outcomes as he divides people into one or two groups.

He doesn't say there will be no future. That your time on earth, that's it. He doesn't say that. He says you do have a future. He doesn't say there is one future.

As universalists say, everyone will go to the same place. He says there will be two. He doesn't say there will be three as if there would be a kind of purgatory, a kind of halfway house where you can perform in some kind of moral gym to get you from one place to the other and work your way up. No, he says there will be two. And he doesn't say there will be many as if every religion could be true. He says there are two. And they go like this.

Come, take your inheritance, your kingdom, your life. Or secondly, depart to what he calls the punishment of fire.

[ 8 : 22 ] And of course, many people object to this. And we ourselves find this hard to hear, don't we? But it's not as though Jesus is being unfair or just scaring people.

It is a reality. If it's not a reality, then we shouldn't be talking like this. But if it is a reality, then Jesus is doing the loving thing, isn't he?

Warning. And we as Christians and as preachers, we find it very difficult to talk about hell. And hell has gone off the agenda of the church for a long time.

And I think the world looks at us and wonders, well, why is the gospel so great? Because we've stopped talking about the bad news, so the good news actually doesn't make much sense anymore. And it's much more friendly for us to say, we'd like you to have life to the full, that's what God wants. Or that all would be well.

[ 9 : 23 ] But it's no good you and I this morning just imagining that there is no hell. Or wanting there to be no hell. We might as well imagine that there's no heaven.

No, Jesus says to us, they are both real. And therefore, we must take seriously the one who is our Lord and Savior. Our King and our authority. If there is no judgment, well, of course, there is no justice.

And if there is no justice, there is no restraint. And there is no hope. But the coming of Christ, Jesus says, is absolutely certain.

And he is going to finish what he has begun. I read a wonderful quote from Gresham Machen, the American theologian from the last century. And he said this. It's true that the Christian gospel is an account.

Not of something that happened yesterday. But of something that happened long ago. But the important thing is, it really happened. And if it really happened, then it makes little difference when it happened.

[10:31] No matter when it happened, whether yesterday or in the first century, it remains a real piece of news, a real gospel. And so here is the historical Jesus.

Telling us that he will return for certain. Secondly, let's see the surprising criteria. The surprising criteria. The people on the right and the people on the left are shocked.

By the way Jesus conducts his assessment. And you'll notice that Jesus puts people on the right or the left. On the right they get a welcome. And on the left they get a dismissal forever.

Now how does Jesus decide who goes on the right and who goes on the left? That's the issue. And I want you to listen very, very carefully. Because this passage has been hugely misunderstood by people who are not Christians.

Who think that Jesus is teaching salvation by being good, by being kind. In other words, Jesus is saying to people, be nice. You were nice to people.

[11:34] You gave them food. You gave them drink. You gave them clothes. You were kind to them. And so welcome to heaven. And on the left you were not nice to people. You didn't give them food.

You didn't give them clothes. You didn't visit them. You weren't kind to them. Depart. And people read this and they think, well actually I'm relatively kind to people.

I'm pretty sure I think I've been kind. I'm fine. And you need to be really careful on this misunderstanding. It's not what Jesus is saying at all.

This passage has been hugely misunderstood by Christians too. Who keep quoting it and beating us with it as if it's the church looking after the world.

Now as Christians we do care about the world. We are told to love our neighbor. And we are told to do good to people.

[12:32] And we're told where possible to meet needs. But that isn't what this passage is teaching. Jesus is not teaching that you'll get a welcome if you're nice to people.

And you'll get a rejection if you're not nice to people. And I want to show you why this cannot be true. And that's why this passage is not saying that. He's not saying in this passage that the church is to look after the world.

The first proof of that is that Jesus is not talking to the church. But the nations. He's telling the nations what they did or didn't do.

He's talking to the nations. The second thing is the big question for Jesus is what did you do for my brothers? And the question for the people of the world is what did you do for Jesus' brothers?

For Jesus' brothers and sister? Well who are Jesus' brothers? And the answer in the Bible and in Matthew particularly is that the brothers of Jesus as we've seen as we've gone through Matthew are not just general human beings.

[13:39] They are not just the human race in general. They are not just society. They are not mankind. They are not anyone and everyone. The brothers of Jesus in Jesus' mind and in Jesus' mouth are his disciples.

And that's really important. He wants to know what the nations have done to his disciples on the last day. He's going to work out how the nations have treated his disciples.

Let me give you some examples. So Matthew 12 and verse 46. He's standing preaching there on one occasion. And his own flesh and blood, his mother Mary and his brothers come and they stand outside.

And somebody comes in and taps Jesus on the shoulder while he's preaching and say, Listen Jesus, your mum and your brothers are outside waiting for you. And Jesus responds in Matthew 12, 46.

He says, Who are my brothers? And who is my mother? And who is my sister? And pointing to his disciples who are in front of him, he says, These are my brothers and sister and mother.

[ 14 : 46 ] And then in Matthew 18, Jesus says, If your brother sins against you, if a fellow believer sins against you, you must try and fix it up.

And if you don't get them to fix the relationship, you treat them as if they're not a believer. In other words, they're in trouble and they need to be helped. Or Matthew 28, you could go there.

And from the grave, Jesus says to the women who've come to the tomb, Go and tell my brothers that I'm going ahead of them. And so they run and they tell the disciples.

So the brothers in Jesus' mind are his followers, his disciples. And thirdly, he says, If anyone gives a cup of water.

See that in verse 35? If anyone gives a cup of water. And that is a loaded phrase. Because back in Matthew chapter 10, Jesus has sent his disciples out on a mission.

[ 15 : 45 ] And he says to his disciples, I'm going to watch and see who welcomes you. And if anyone welcomes you, they actually welcome me. And they are welcoming the Father.

In effect, Jesus says, If anyone gives you a cup of water, because you are my disciple, they won't lose their reward. Jesus is saying his witnesses, his brothers, those who are now going to do the work of mission.

Because Jesus has left the world. And they will go out with the gospel. And they are going to go to the nations. And the way that the nations respond to the disciples, that is going to be announced on the last day.

When Jesus returns. So as Jesus returns to the world, the big question is this. What did you do with his disciples? What did you do with the message?

What did you do when the messengers, with the message of the kingdom, came to you? Because if you received the messages, and you received the message, you received the kingdom.

[ 16 : 52 ] And you received the king. And you received the father who sent him. And so here is the big question to the nations on the last day. Were you a receiver?

He's not asking in this question, were you an achiever? What have you done? He wants to know whether you were a receiver.

And that is the point. I was talking this week about this with a friend of mine. And he said this. He said, this passage is not a call for the church to look after the world.

This is a passage for the world to be receptive to the church. And on the last day, as Jesus watches you go into the world.

And as each one of us lives our lives in the world. And we seek and we try to be witnesses to Christ. And we often get knocked back. Wonderfully, Jesus takes note.

[ 17 : 52 ] And when we get listened to, Jesus takes note. And he announces it on the last day. And one more reason why this passage is not teaching salvation by good deeds, by being kind, is that in the very next chapter, Jesus kneels down in the garden.

And he says, Heavenly Father, if it is your will that I don't go through the crucifixion, if it is possible, please take this cup from me. In other words, if it is possible that people could just be kind and just be nice and just do good things and be saved.

And the Father says, no, that is impossible. And Jesus says, not my will but yours. And he goes ahead with the crucifixion. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.

He only could unlock the door of Hermann and Nelson. Thirdly, I want us to see the massive consequences. Can you look at the welcome in verse 24? The massive welcome.

He says to those who have welcomed the gospel. And so many of you watching this morning, you have welcomed the gospel. And you know you've welcomed the gospel because God in his mercy has given you ears to hear.

[ 19 : 18 ] And he's given you a will to respond. And you find yourself saying again and again and again to God, this is amazing, Lord, that you've caused this to happen. And Jesus says to those who welcome the gospel, you are blessed by my Father.

Come, take your inheritance. Just notice that. It's not something that you didn't earn it. But it's been given to you. It's a kingdom prepared for you before the creation of the world.

What an astonishing thing. That the Lord Jesus says to his people on the last day, there is a God who loves you. And there is a God who's planned an inheritance and a kingdom for you.

And he's thought ahead. And you will respond to it. And receive it. And enjoy it. Just as a mum and dad, they might plan a surprise party for their child.

And so they delight when their child sees what has been done. And so God here plans this incredible future. But look at the dismissal in chapter 25 and verse 41.

[ 20 : 25 ] He says to those who've dismissed the gospel, who've rejected the gospel, he says, depart. Get out. You are not blessed. You stay under the curse.

And he says these very difficult words. He says, you go to the fire that was not prepared for you. I didn't plan this for you. It was planned for the devil and his angels.

And I think you can feel the grief as Jesus says it. And both these two futures are eternal. And they're both of the same duration, aren't they? The kingdom, the fire. The life, the punishment. Is this fair? Is this fair? There are some decisions that we make that are extremely consequential. Have huge consequences. And when we turn our back on Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, it is extremely consequential.

[ 21 : 26 ] And when we turn our back on him, that has huge consequences. But when we turn to him and we receive the way, the truth, and the life, it is extremely consequential in a wonderful, wonderful way.

And so let me say a quick word to those who are still saying no to Jesus Christ. I speak to you. And maybe you're saying not yet.

Not now. And so let me say to you that you couldn't be playing with greater fire than you are playing with. And you may say it's not my fault.

It's the church. It's the minister. It's my family. Or it's the lack of evidence. And all of those things may fail you. But you have got no reason for turning your back on Jesus Christ, who is wonderful. And who's made it possible for you to be saved. And let me say a very quick word to those who have welcomed Christ. And you are going to hear one day this word.

[ 22 : 42 ] You're going to hear welcome. And that will be the greatest day in the universe. The day you hear the welcome. And do keep asking, as I keep asking God to impress this upon me so that it's not just water off a duck's back.

And meaningless to me. And you do ask God to impress the reality of these things upon us. Say to God, please work these things into me and through me and out of me.

And not just over me. Because the issues are so great. Let's bow before God in prayer.