

The Kingdom is Here (Carry the Fire)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was 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 welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they 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 minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as 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.”

Matthew 25:31-46

- Jesus stands and looks at his disciples.
- They have been together now for **three** years.
- Never before had they heard a man speak with such authority.
- Never before had they seen the signs and the wonders he'd performed.
- Never before had they seen demons tremble, the implausible sinners drawn, and the presumptively righteous walk away
- It has been **three years** with the man Jesus of Nazareth and in **three** days he will go to the shameful cross.

In his last teaching directly for his disciples, his will set on going to Jerusalem, his heart looking forward to a greater day, he opens his mouth and says,

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.” Matthew 25:31

The Glorious Coming

- Jesus knows it is three days before he, the sinless and eternal Son of God hangs on a tree for the sins of the world.
- He has spent the last hours giving the disciples imploring and teaching the disciples what the end of the world will be like, to wait expectantly, to be ready for the day he returns and now he gives his final teaching to them and we must start where Jesus starts.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory

-Not if, but when

-There is coming a day where Jesus the Christ will *Personally, Physically, Visibly, and Suddenly*¹ return to the earth created by the Eternal Word spoken by the Father, redeemed according to the eternal plan of the Father to send the Son in the love and unity of the Spirit, to now consummate and reunite the heavens and the earth.

Not only will He come personally, physically, visibly, and suddenly, but he will come in **gloriously in His glory.**

Revelation 19:11-16

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Heaven will be torn open and the Son of Man will come

- on a white horse,
- the Faithful and the True
- with robe dipped in blood
- with many crowns
- and all his angels
- a tattoo on his thigh which reads King of kings and Lord of lords

He will come and on that day no one will question his authority.

So we begin our teaching where Jesus begins, with the glorious coming of the Son of Man in his glory to sit on his glorious throne.

And he rightfully takes his place on his throne to judge the world, all peoples, in righteousness.

read v32-33

- panta ta ethne: all nations, all people, both the living and the dead, also in Matthew 24:14; 28:19
- he separates them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
- he's alluding to and fulfilling that prophesied day in Ezekiel 34 where the true Shepherd of would search, seek, and find all of his sheep, rescue them and bring them into everlasting good pastures.
- He puts the sheep on his right (the place of ruling and power) and the goats on his left.

The Final Judgment

Transition: You want me to tell you how, in my study I secretly discovered this text doesn't mean what it clearly says. I can't do that.

These words of Jesus cause fear and trepidation for all of us, but

There is beauty here. There is something forming in the tension of the text that we all long to know is true.

¹Berkhof, Louis, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Banner of Truth Trust, 1941), 705-706.

So we'll take these words of Christ as they come and they will shape us.

1. Foundation of Grace

read v 34

-It's an uncomfortable grace, as all true intimacy is at first.

-That a Holy God would draw so near to us that he'd want to indwell us, die for us, live with us forever?

-It's a grace that is a gift, a choice, based on nothing in us, but everything in the Father's heart.

-This is a text that begins with the glory of Christ and the grace of the Father.

-I think Paul imbibed these words of Jesus that led him to write, under the inspiration of the Spirit

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We need to be on guard against two errors when it comes to this passage

1. The Role of Works

- a. Some have used this text to try to say that we are really saved by the good stuff we do.
 - verse 34 serves as a guardrail to keep us from the blasphemy of salvation by works
- b. What we do doesn't matter
 - We can't 'intellectualize'² this passage. The things we do, our works, clearly are of eternal significance.
 - You have to do theological gymnastics to walk away from these words thinking works have no eternal consequence in the life of everyone.

2. This is about how to just get to heaven

2. The Words of the Kings

He gives two speeches.

-This is literary genius

-Everything is in the right place

-The symmetry is perfect

To the Sheep, he says: read v35-36

Now skip down to v41-43: read v41-43

Hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, in prison

Jesus says inherit the Kingdom you blessed by my Father or Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire FOR, you either did these things or didn't do these things.

I want these to hang in the air for a moment. Remember, there's something forming in the tension.

You did or you did not.

^{2 2} Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 635.

So we can say

1. We have a real responsibility to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, etc.
2. These are good, true, and beautiful things
3. In some way, every single one of these acts is an act of fidelity to Jesus.

Now the key in this text I believe is the twin surprises we're met with.

Read v37-40

The sheep, the righteous say, "when was that you?" **They never looked to this as their salvation.**

Read v44-45

The goats, the wicked, will say, "when was that you?" **And the implication is: We would've done that if we knew if it was you.**

Our actions, flowing from the heart, always betray us and show what we really believe.

The Kingdom is Here

So let me ask you a question: Do you believe the Kingdom is here?

Jesus came, saying in **Matthew 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

Feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome in the stranger, these are all works of the Kingdom!

-Not just heaven, pie in the sky

-The Kingdom of heaven is where the rule and reign of God is present and operative

-Here

-Like Jesus is really King and so that changes everything

How are we going to make it in this world? How are we going to do the work of the Kingdom

-There's wickedness everywhere, too many hungry, too many thirsty, it's all overwhelming

Carry the Fire

I recently read *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. It's a post-apocalyptic book set in America with a nameless father and his son. Beautifully written, but it plumbs the depths of despair and bleakness of life. How do the father and the son keep going? How do they live differently when everything around them is falling apart?

In one part, the son asks his dad if they'd ever do the evil things the other people are doing:

No. Of Course not.

No matter what.

No. No matter what.

Because we're the good guys.

Yes.

And we're carrying the fire.

And we're carrying the fire.

Yes.

Okay.³

³ McCarthy, Cormac, *The Road*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books), 128-129.

Then, near the end of the father's life, he tells his son he'll have to go on without him:

I want to be with you.
You cant.
Please.
You cant. You have to carry the fire.
I dont know how to.
Yes you do.
Is it real? The fire?
Yes it is.
Where is it? I dont know where it is.
Yes you do. It's inside you...⁴

The way the son held on is believing that he "carried the fire."

Now, this isn't just a motivational speech. I'm not rah-rah, let's do the work of the Kingdom.

That's not the story of the Bible.

In his intro of 1-2 Kings, the story of the Kings and Kingdom of Israel, Peter Leithart writes:

"The message of the prophets is not, "Israel has sinned; therefore, Israel needs to get its act together or it will die." The message is, "Israel has sinned; therefore, Israel must die, and its only hope is to entrust itself to a God who will give it new life on the far side of death." Or even, "Israel has sinned; Israel is already dead. Cling to the God who raises the dead."⁵

-Peter Leithart, *1&2 Kings*, 18.

You can't just start doing the work of the Kingdom. You need to believe the right story.
I'm telling you the story of the universe you know to be true.

You were made by the King of the universe.
He made you to love him and keep his good commandments.
You rebelled against the King.
We have not done the work of the kingdom.
Yet the King renounced his own kingly rights for you.
He was hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, willfully imprisoned to a cross for you.
The King died.
But on the third day, the King rose from the dead!
His Kingdom is here, but not fully.
His Kingdom is coming.
And the King now commands all to submit to his rule and his reign.
To enter the Kingdom, you must die to yourself and trust only in the life, death, and resurrection of the King
His is a Kingdom that will never end.
He now invites us to do the work of the Kingdom.
Because the King is truly alive. And the Kingdom is truly here.

⁴ Ibid., 278-279.

⁵ Leithart, Peter, *1&2 Kings*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press), 18.