

Suggested Reading

This week you may wish to read the following passages from the Bible.

A Recommended Reading

Matthew 26:1 - 28:20

B Read Carefully

Matthew	27:3 - 10	The Death of Judas
Matthew	27:62-66	Guards at the Tomb
Matthew	28:11-20	The Resurrection
Matthew	28:11-15	Bribing the Soldiers
Matthew	28:16-20	Commissioning the Disciples

C Background Reading

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12.	The Suffering Servant.
Psalms 22(22)	My God, why have you forsaken me

Prayer

O God, who by the pages of both Testaments
Instruct and prepare us to celebrate the Paschal Mystery,
Grant that we may comprehend your mercy,
So that the gifts we receive from you this night
may confirm our hope of the gifts to come.
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Easter Vigil)

PFP v6 2/2020

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Henley on Thames



The Final Sermon.

6

Matthew 19:1 - 25:46



The Final Sermon is set on the Mount of Olives. Following Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and the subsequent events and controversies that occur there; the final Sermon looks forward to the immediate future of this city, and the second coming of the Son of Man, as well as the present concerns of the Christian community.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is understood by Matthew to fulfil the prophecy of *Zachariah 9:9-10*. Jesus is the Messiah, the lowly King who enters his own city on a donkey. Jesus leaves Galilee behind to enter the spiritual and political centre of the nation. Jesus travels directly to the Temple, where he begins to 'cleanse' the Temple which causes immediate controversy with the Chief Priests and the Scribes. The Chief Priests and Elders, (those who later would form the Sanhedrin) challenge the authority of Jesus. His response silences them and is followed by three parables of judgement: the Two Sons, the Tenants in the Vineyard, and the Marriage Feast (*Mtt 21:28-22:14*).

The three parables focus on the judgement upon the chosen people of God and the inclusion of the Gentiles. They are addressed to the Chief Priests and Elders and their conclusion is directed to them. *'The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'* (21:43 - found only in Matthew).

There follow four controversy stories against the Jewish leaders: Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees, and a Lawyer. There are different subjects: taxation, the Resurrection, the greatest commandment, the Son of David. In each case the Jewish leaders are reduced to silence. This rejection of their authority to teach leads to a further attack upon the Scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus has already rejected their teaching authority, which he has given to Peter and the Church. *Chap. 23* represents the complete rejection of their authority. They are described as hypocrites because they do not practice what they preach. There follow seven woes: a seven-fold attack upon the Scribes and Pharisees which may well contrast the seven-fold blessing of the Beatitudes. This chapter concludes with the lament over Jerusalem which introduces the Final Sermon.

Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time and proceeds to the Mount of Olives from where he teaches his disciples *'privately'* about the last things. This location is significant because not only does it overlook Jerusalem; according to Jewish belief this the place where the second coming will take place: the theme of the sermon.

The Final Sermon falls into two sections with the description of the coming of the Son of Man at its centre. (*Mtt 24:29-31*) The material prior to this is parallel to *Mark 13*, concerning the future of Jerusalem and the Church community. The material following the central section, stresses the necessary requirement of vigilance and patience.

This style of literature is called *'Apocalyptic'* and its subject *'Eschatology.'* Apocalypse derives from the Greek = *'revelation.'* Eschatology is the doctrine of the four *'last things'* = death, judgement, heaven and hell.

Next Week

The Passion according to Matthew

Next week we will conclude Matthew's Gospel by studying the Passion Narrative. The Passion and Resurrection have a primary place within each Gospel. It is here that the Evangelist seeks to draw out the themes within his Gospel. As we study the Passion narrative, it would be helpful to note how Matthew refers to the themes he has introduced previously.

Within the Passion narrative there are several passages which are unique to Matthew. These passages include the Death of Judas, the Guards at the Tomb, the Bribing the Soldiers and the Commissioning the Disciples after the Resurrection. What conclusions can we draw from the inclusion of these passages?

The Old Testament is an important theme of Matthew's Gospel. He has consistently shown how Jesus has fulfilled the scriptures at important junctures in his ministry. His death and resurrection are of the greatest significance to the disciple. How does Matthew use the Old Testament in the section? You may wish to study the context of each of the passages he uses in the Old Testament.

IN BRIEF

1051 *Every man receives his eternal recompense in his immortal soul from the moment of his death in a particular judgement by Christ, the judge of the living and the dead.*

1052 *'We believe that the souls of all who die in Christ's grace ... are the People of God beyond death. On the day of resurrection, death will be definitively conquered, when these souls will be reunited with their bodies' (Paul VI, CPG § 28).*

1053 *'We believe that the multitude of those gathered around Jesus and Mary in Paradise forms the Church of heaven, where in eternal blessedness they see God as he is and where they are also, to various degrees, associated with the holy angels in the divine governance exercised by Christ in glory, by interceding for us and helping our weakness by their fraternal concern' (Paul VI, CPG § 29).*

1054 *Those who die in God's grace and friendship imperfectly purified, although they are assured of their eternal salvation, undergo a purification after death, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of God.*

1055 *By virtue of the 'communion of saints', the Church commends the dead to God's mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf.*

1056 *Following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful of the 'sad and lamentable reality of eternal death' (GCD 69), also called 'hell'.*

1057 *Hell's principal punishment consists of eternal separation from God in whom alone man can have the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.*

1058 *The Church prays that no one should be lost: 'Lord, let me never be parted from you.' If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God 'desires all men to be saved' (1 Tim 2:4), and that for him 'all things are possible' (Mt 19:26).*

1059 *'The holy Roman Church firmly believes and confesses that on the Day of Judgement all men will appear in their own bodies before Christ's tribunal to render an account of their own deeds' (Council of Lyons II [1274]: DS 859; cf. DS 1549).*

1060 *At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Then the just will reign with Christ for ever, glorified in body and soul, and the material universe itself will be transformed. God will then be 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28), in eternal life.*

Apocalyptic language addresses a current reality with the imagery of future events. Each of these images can be related to a three-fold situation:

1. The **experience** - Jerusalem & the Prophets.
2. The **present** experience of the Church in 85AD - the destruction of Jerusalem, the persecution of Christians.
3. The **future** - the return of Jesus at the end of time.

At the beginning of the sermon the disciples ask a three-fold question:

'when will this be, ... what will be the sign of your coming ... and of the end of the age.' (Mtt 24:3) This sermon seeks to address these questions.

Jesus begins by speaking of the beginning of the tribulations. We may understand each of these prophecies of Jesus as addressed to the future, However, this may not necessarily mean the end of time. Wars, Famines and Earthquakes have been the experience of every generation since Jesus. For Jesus (33 AD) these events would be in the future. For Matthew (85 AD) these events would be in the present.

The destruction of the Temple had taken place in 70 AD. Persecution was a reality. The fear was that *'the love of many will grow cold.'* (Mtt 24:12) The *'disastrous abomination'* of which Daniel spoke is a reference to the statue of Antiochus Epiphanes placed in the Temple in 168 BC. This desecration of the Temple was the beginning of the Maccabean War. Such hindsight would be the basis of the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Such knowledge would prepare the believer for the coming trial. It is a partial answer to *verse 3*.

Mtt 24:29-31 is at the heart of the Final Sermon. It addresses these questions in detail. Matthew describes the coming of the Son of Man in terms which echo the Book of Daniel. In this sense the title *'Son of Man'* does not suggest Christ's humanity, but rather his divinity which is expressed in the greatest means possible. It looks forward to the second coming of Jesus at the end of time, as King and Judge.

In the early Church it was believed that Jesus would return soon. The delay caused a dilemma for some Christians. Matthew addresses this dilemma with his call for vigilance and patience. Christians should not speculate upon the 'day' or the 'hour', but rather concentrate on being 'ready' and 'prepared' when that day comes.

Three parables reinforce this motif. The uncertainty of the time of Christ's coming and the insistence upon the need for vigilance serve to underline this motif. These parables stress the theme of delay, the need to be faithful and prudent, the reward of greater responsibility, and the punishment of the wicked who do not keep watch. These parables are directed at church leaders.

The last judgement is the climax and highpoint of this Final Sermon. It concerns the tension between living soberly in the present, while having one's attention firmly fixed on the life of the world to come. How we act during this apparent lull between the two comings of Christ will determine our position in this great event.

Ironically the way to prepare for the second coming of Christ is to focus on his presence within those around us. To recognise Christ in our neighbour today, will be how we will recognise Christ in the future when he returns. It is Christ who we serve, Christ who we minister to. It is as if it *were* done to him. This is a personal action in our relationship with Jesus. If we serve *him*, he will thank us. If we neglect *him*, he will condemn us.

This concludes his teaching ministry. Now the time has come to suffer and to die (*Mtt 26,1*).

1040 The Last Judgement will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming. Then through his Son Jesus Christ he will pronounce the final word on all history. We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation, and understand the marvellous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end. The Last Judgement will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death.⁶²⁶

1041 The message of the Last Judgement calls men to conversion while God is still giving them 'the acceptable time, . . . the day of salvation'.⁶²⁷ It inspires a holy fear of God and commits them to the justice of the Kingdom of God. It proclaims the 'blessed hope' of the Lord's return, when he will come 'to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all who have believed'.⁶²⁸

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