

29.10.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Nations and End of the Age

Bible Readings = Acts 17:22-31 and Matt. 25:31-26:2

Introduction:

- (1) Last time we were on this theme, we saw how the Son exercised his authority through the gospel.
- (2) We looked at the *general principle* in which Paul understood his apostolic ministry was to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations, and a *specific example*, as we saw the Lord exercise his dominion over Ephesus, Asia Minor and the worship of Artemis through the preaching of the word.
- (3) In what has come commonly to be known as the great commission passage we also saw that the current age in which we live is *time limited*: Lo, I am with you always, even to the *end of the age*.

This week, will be considering the fact that the end of the age is both an inescapable reality and a matter of deep assurance. This allows us to live in the midst of the nations without fear of the fact that (currently) the kings of the earth take their stand together against the Lord and against his anointed.

1. The Reality of the Coming Judgement Day

(1) When we come to discuss matters related to this topic we must be careful not to speculate, or to go beyond what is clearly revealed. Many a wasted hour has been spent trying to work out the details of one prophetic schema or another.

- Today we aim to concentrate on that which is edifying for heart and mind.

(2) The fact of the coming end of the age is repeatedly spoken of in the New Testament, with over 300 references to it.

- The age ever since the coming of the Son of Man has been the last days (e.g. Hebrews 1:1f.; Acts 2:17), but the New Testament bears constant witness to the final consummation of all things through the appearing of the Son of Man.
- In this current age he is with us always (as in Matt. 28:20), but this age is still an age of conflict and battle (e.g. Gal. 1:4 cf. John 15:18-19; 17:14-15; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 2:15; etc.)
 - We still pray ‘Thy Kingdom Come...’
- As Paul says, we are those upon whom the ends of the ages has come (1 Cor. 10:11)

- Overlap of the ages. Compare with the weather systems in SA!

(3) The last great day is spoken of in different ways e.g. the day of the Lord, the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Day, the Great Day, etc. It is sometimes described by terms such as his coming (*parousia*), appearing (*epiphaneia*) or his unveiling/revealing (*apocalypsis*).

- Whatever the case, the appearing is going to be incontrovertible, irreversible and final.
 - E.g. Matt. 24:30-31 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four

winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Acts 1:11 "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Rev. 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen

- The purpose of that coming will be the vindication of the Son of Man, and the universal declaration of the fact that he is the Lord of all; the gathering together of God's complete church, and her full glorification; the final judgement on the enemies of the Lord and his anointed; the establishment in history and for eternity of the Kingdom of God.
- It will be unexpected (hence the parables in Matt. 24 and 25 and the direct statements of Jesus in this context e.g. Matt. 24:42-44) and inescapable (e.g. in Revelation 6:12-17).
 - Each of the parables in Matt 25 has the same features: the suddenness of the return; the contrast between those prepared and those who are not; the fact of rewards and judgements; and the dismay among those who have not been ready.

(4) It figures as *the* great object of hope in the New Testament (e.g. Titus 2:13), and was a matter of continual comfort for the New Testament communities (e.g. 2 Thess. 1:3-12 cf. 1 Thess. 4:18; 2 Thess. 2:16ff.; etc.)

- It thus formed part of the regular preaching and exposition of the plan and purpose of God (as in Acts 17:31 cf. Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:5, 16; 2 Tim. 4:1; etc.)
- Interesting to note that the more prosperous and secure the church becomes the less the teaching of the *parousia* figures, except by way of a puzzle to be solved. In the context of suffering, affliction, persecution, heartache and pain the reality of the doctrine finds its full life.
 - Could we ever really live by faith if we did not have this hope before us?
 - How could we live with all the unresolved uncertainties of life if we did not have this hope before us?

2. The Nations and the Great Day

(1) The Bible teaches us that the Great Day is related to the nations in a number of ways.

- It is to follow the preaching of the gospel to the nations, and will not come before this has happened. Matt. 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. This is the day of grace for the nations.
- The rule of Christ will be violently opposed by one known as 'the man of lawlessness' (2 Thess. 2:3), to act as a judgement on those who suppress the truth and who walk in lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:12).
- But that the nations will be brought to the judgement seat of the Son of Man (as in Matt. 25), and that his judgement will be universal in its scope. The nations are there, but this does not exclude individual responsibility.

(2) The thrust of the judgement in Matt. 25 relates to the reception of the messengers of the gospel, the brothers of the Lord, and this as evidence of whether the nations have gladly come under the word of the King or not.

- So Paul's statement in Acts 17:30-31 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.
- (3) So what about us? How do we relate to this great coming fact?
- Heidelberg Catechism Q. 52 How does Christ's return 'to judge the living and the dead' comfort you?
 - A. In all my distress and persecution, I turn my eyes to the heavens and confidently await as judge the very One who has already stood trial in my place before God and so has removed the whole curse from me. All his enemies and mine he will condemn to everlasting punishment: but me and all his chosen ones he will take with him into the joy and glory of heaven.