



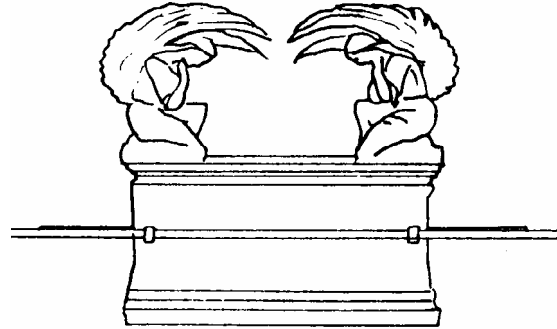
Lesson 26

THE JUDGEMENT

Reading **Matthew 25**

God must be obeyed

When King David was established on his throne, he decided to bring the Ark of God from Kirjath-jearim, where it had been for some time, to his capital city, Jerusalem. A new cart was made, to be pulled by oxen. When all was ready, the priests of God walked beside the ark as it went on its way. But at one point, the oxen stumbled, and a man called Uzzah put out his hand to hold the ark and steady it. Then, we are told, a terrible thing happened:



"God smote him there for his error; and there he died" (2 Samuel 6:7).

Why was the punishment so severe, when all that Uzzah had done was to steady the Ark of God? God had said quite plainly in the book of Numbers that His ark must always be carried by the priests on their shoulders. So either Uzzah did not know God's commandment, or he did not choose to obey it. In either case, he was guilty before God.

This account shows us that God is holy and great, and rightly demands obedience from those who serve Him

Men who despise God's love

Jesus once told a story about a king who made a marriage feast for his son. When the feast was ready he sent his servants to call the guests; but those guests refused to go! They preferred to get on with their own every-day affairs rather than to obey the king's summons to the wedding. No wonder the king was angry, and sent his servants to destroy the men who had despised his invitation (Matthew 22:1-14).

God is a great King. If He has graciously invited a man or woman to share in the joys of His kingdom on earth, and that person deliberately says, "I do not want what God is offering me, and I will not obey Him" - then there will come a time of judgement, and that person will be condemned. As we read in Galatians 6:7: "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Resurrection and judgement

The Bible teaches us that there will be a day of judgement after the resurrection. God is loving; but He is also just and upright. As it says in Exodus 34:7. "(God) will by no means clear the guilty". He could not give eternal life to men and women who had despised His love, and who - knowing that Jesus had died for them - made no effort to serve and obey Him. So Paul tells us:

"We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10)

"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

There must be a time of reckoning

Jesus once said to his followers:

"Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am" (John 13:13).

In New Testament times, if a man bought a slave, he would own that slave totally. The slave could no longer please himself; he had one task in life-to please his master.

Now Jesus bought us with his own blood, when he gave his life on the cross as a sacrifice for sin. So Paul tells us:

"Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20)

This means that we are responsible to the Lord Jesus for the way we live our lives. When he comes again he will reward the faithful, and punish those who have despised his ways

Truth in a parable

To teach his followers about their responsibilities to him, Jesus told a parable which you will find in Matthew 25:14-30. Read it now for yourself. Notice verse 21, which tells of the reward of the faithful servant: "... Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

The man who had not obeyed could expect no such reward. His punishment was severe. Notice verse 30:

"Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The righteous judge

When Jesus comes again, he will raise the dead, and gather together those of his followers who are living at that time. There will be a time of judgement. After the judgement, those who have been accepted will be given eternal life, and Jesus will say to them:

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus himself will be the judge (see John 5:28-30), and will judge with the wisdom that God has given him. We read in Isaiah 11:

"He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isaiah 11:3-4).

Men can only judge by what they see and hear; but the Lord Jesus will know the hearts of men, and he will make no mistakes in his judgement.

Who will be at the Judgement Seat?

Those whom the Lord counts responsible, who have heard God's gracious offer of life, and know they should submit to it, will be gathered to the Judgement Seat of Christ

But they will not be the only ones. There will be men and women who lived before the times of Jesus, as well as those who lived afterwards; all of them will be called before Christ's judgement seat to account for what they have done about the gospel message, the "pearl of great price". Those who have been unfaithful will be at the Judgement Seat with those who have tried to live up to the example of Jesus' perfect life. Hebrews 10:26-27 warns us:

"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries".

Jesus himself tells us: "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

Those who have never known about the true God, and His plan of redemption, will not be raised to judgement. You may remember the verses in Psalm 49:19, 20 which say of such a man:

"He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish."

You will see that the idea of going to heaven when we die simply will not fit in with these Bible truths.

Joy for those who are accepted

Those who are accepted at the judgement will be given eternal life. Their bodies will never again feel pain or tiredness or any human weakness, and their minds will never again be tempted to think wrong thoughts. It will be a time of great rejoicing for the faithful. In the Bible it is said to be like a wedding feast, and we read in Revelation 19:9: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

When Jesus was with his disciples, sharing his last meal on earth with them before his death - we call it 'the last supper' - he said to them:

"I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30).

When the Kingdom comes, the twelve apostles are to rule over Israel, which will then be the most important nation on earth. Every disciple accepted by Jesus will share in the work of ruling the world. So we read in Revelation 5:9, 10 that the faithful saints sung a song, saying:

"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation: and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

What will happen to those who are rejected?

We have seen that those who come before the Judgement Seat of Christ will be divided into two classes. Christ will accept some, and reject others. He will give eternal life to those he accepts. But what will happen to those who are found unworthy? What will their punishment be? We do not know the details, but some things are quite certain. First, they will see how foolish they have been; they will realise what wonderful blessings they have thrown away, and this will cause them agony of mind. Jesus said of such people:

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." (Luke 13:28).

Finally, they will be completely destroyed. Jesus likened the judgement to a harvest where the good corn is separated from useless weeds. The corn is carefully preserved, but the weeds are destroyed in the farmer's bonfire (Matthew 13:36-43). Paul taught the same thing very plainly:

"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power"
(2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

PEOPLE JUDGED

SOME ACCEPTED
& GIVEN
ETERNAL LIFE

SOME REJECTED
& DESTROYED

Love or fear?

There are some passages in the Bible which seem to warn us not to be too confident about our position at the judgement; whereas other scriptures seem to encourage us to be full of confidence. There is no real contradiction. We can have no confidence in ourselves - but we can have total confidence in the saving power of God. For, as we read in Romans 8:32:

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Though we may begin by being afraid of God, we shall gradually learn to love Him and trust Him completely. And so John says:

"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of Judgment... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:17-18).

Summary

1. There will be a judgement day.
2. It will follow the resurrection.
3. All who have known and understood the truth of God will be brought to judgement.
4. Those who are accepted at the Judgement Seat will then be given eternal life.
5. Those who are rejected will suffer agonies of mind, and will be destroyed.

Chapters to read

2 Corinthians 5

A verse to learn

2 Corinthians 5:10

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."