

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH XXXIII

(Reading: Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 22:7-21)

What This World's All Coming To

There's an expression people use when they become somewhat frustrated with the way society is going. During a time when things just don't seem to be making any sense, they say, "What's this world coming to!"

Perhaps you said it after the result of the last Federal General Election, or Parliament passed a particular law. To you the issues seemed very clear. There was only one way people could sensibly vote.

The difficulty with that, though, is it presumes we can perfectly know which way to go. And that's not exactly the world we live in. In fact, doesn't what's happening all around us in this world, and also we ourselves, show how much this world is being judged all along? We are all sinners.

So Chapter 33 of the Westminster Confession of Faith has an apt title. Because by calling this teaching 'Of the Last Judgment' it recognises that there's been a judgment all along.

The apostle Peter said in his first letter chapter 4 verse 17 that judgment was already beginning then. And how much hasn't mankind condemned itself even more since then?

Therefore, when Article 1 here says that God "will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ," it's not merely that Jesus Christ will be God's agent to do this. In fact, He will be, as He is already, the standard of the judgment. For on this final judgment day the world will be judged, not by some impossible divine standard, but by One who Himself participated in it. Jesus knows what this world is, from the inside!

What's Going To Happen On Judgement Day

In the words of our first aspect, this is WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN ON JUDGEMENT DAY. Article 1 paints the vivid picture.

And let's not forget the context, either. This last judgement follows on from the great resurrection. For it's once we've been raised at that last day of this age, our souls joined with our physical bodies, that then we are all judged.

This is the day the apostle Paul describes in Romans 2 verse 16. He says there that this is "the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."

So Scripture speaks of the visible bodily return of Jesus Christ, the general resurrection of all men, and the general judgment of all men. Anyone not holding to these three key points about The Last Judgement is in serious error.

And there are many Christians who are wrong on this point. Though Scripture says that Christ is absolutely in control and so no one knows the times or seasons of this happening, they believe they can tell you. Because they will say that it really depends on you!

This is the teaching known as 'dispensationalism'. It has grown to be today the most popular belief about the end times. You only need to note the success of the 'Left Behind' books and cartoons and movies to realise that! And what about all the hype about Y2K?

You remember - the end of the second millennium twelve years ago. Christian bookshops were filled with a whole lot of drivel about how that had to be the date prophesied.

The teachers of this view place particular emphasis upon the physical and political State of Israel. In fact, they believe so much hinges upon Israel that this period of the Church going out into the whole world is just a mere parenthesis. This age is not what really counts, to them. It's Christ's return as the Messiah and His physical re-establishment of the State of Israel which matters.

This is why a number of major Pentecostal groups in America give millions of their dollars to the government of Israel. The same government which is persecuting Christians!

Our Lord Jesus warned us in Matthew 24 verse 23 against believing those who tell us when He's returning. It will be in His time. And it will be at that time that all are called up to meet Him on the clouds of the air.

There is where the dispensational view of the rapture has got it terribly wrong, because they teach that Christ will return a first time and take all believers to Himself. Then seven years later He'll come back after a terrible time of tribulation in which people have a last chance to come to faith. So you have such silly stories about how it's American airline company policy to make sure that there are never two Christian pilots flying the same plane together. For if the rapture came, and they were taken up, the plane would crash!

Article 1 tells us what Scripture says. All of mankind will be judged at the same judgement on the basis of what they have done, since it's what we have done that shows our character. And it's character which shows our relationship to Jesus Christ, or lack of it.

This is why the righteous in Matthew 25 verse 37 honestly wonder about when they did all those good things the Lord describes. Yet they lived their lives unto Him. And that colours everything!

Why It's Going To Happen On Judgement Day

But now we've moved into the teaching of Article 2. Here we come, in the second place, to seeing WHY IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN ON JUDGEMENT DAY.

You see, believers are looking forward to this day. They have nothing to lose then. In fact, they gain everything then! The final judgement is the day of public vindication when the transforming power of saving faith will be shown. All the glory will be given to Christ!

Our sins won't come into this picture because they're covered by Christ's righteousness. That's what Jesus meant in his parable in Matthew 25. As He says in verse 34 there, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"

But for the unbeliever it's a completely different scene. They should dread that coming day. It's at that judgment that the sinfulness of sin and unbelief as its root will be revealed. That evil will be condemned to the praise of God's glory.

There is a story told of a Christian king of Hungary. He was very sad and reflective. His brother, who was a happy go-lucky chap, wanted to know why he was so down. "O, brother," said the king, "I have been a great sinner against God, and know not how to die, or how to appear before God in judgment!"

The brother made a joke of it. He said, "These are but gloomy thoughts." The king made no reply.

Now, it was a custom of the country, that if the executioner came and sounded a trumpet before any man's door, he was immediately led to execution. The king, in the dead of night, sent the executioner to sound the trumpet before his brother's door. When the brother heard that, and he saw that messenger of death, he came running into the king's presence. He pleaded to know what he could possibly have done to offend him to this extent! What fear gripped his heart!

“Alas! brother,” said the king, “you have never offended me. But isn’t seeing the executioner the most dreadful thing? So shouldn’t I, who has greatly offended God, be afraid to be brought before the judgment seat of Christ?”

Article 2 also tells us that the good which God has willed and the evil which is contrary to His Will will be definitely separated. Each will show up its true character. There’s the wheat and there’s the weeds. And this is the harvest!

It is what the Lord illustrated clearly through ‘The Parable of the Weeds’ in Matthew 13. As He says there in verse 30, it’s at harvest time that they can be definitely separated. Then the weeds will be collected and tied in bundles to be burned while the wheat will be gathered and brought into the barn.

You see, up until judgement day we are inextricably mixed up together into this world. You could hardly tell people apart. And to try and keep them apart will inevitably involved damaging some of the righteous. But at God’s harvest time all the elect will have been brought in. Then the next and final stage can begin.

That’s what we see in the phrase “the presence of the Lord.” You’ll notice it appears twice in Article 2. It’s “the presence of the Lord” which is the determining factor of both the bliss of the redeemed and the doom of the damned. And so there can be no more appropriate reward for the righteous than to be with their Lord, and no more appropriate punishment for the wicked than eternally to find no end to the quest they have not made.

How It Helps Us Knowing About Judgement Day

This brings us very much to think about where we are with the Lord right now. And so it is that the Westminster Confession of Faith ends in Article 3 with the urgent call to always be watchful. In the word of a third aspect to this Chapter 33, we see, **HOW IT HELPS US KNOWING ABOUT JUDGEMENT DAY.**

You see, the Bible says a lot about this coming judgement. And it says it because it puts our lives here in a certain perspective. For this teaching will deter some from evil. It will also give comfort to those who suffer injustice here and now.

Scripture shows how being apathetic to the truth of Christ’s coming in judgement makes people careless and evil. And yet belief in this truth is an encouragement to godliness.

This is the way the apostle Peter describes it. For after picturing the coming of the day of the Lord in his second letter chapter 3, verse 10, he writes in verse 11, “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”

And further on in verse 14 he continues. He says there, “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.” In the town of Maidenhead in England, the Rev. J. Cooke became the Methodist minister. Not long after he was installed, the mayor of the town joined in the worship service on a Sabbath evening. He came to hear Mr Cooke preach.

That night the text was from Revelation 1 verse 7. The words were, “Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him. The mayor’s attention was powerfully arrested. An arrow of conviction pierced his heart. He quickly became a changed man. After that every Sunday he was in church - twice!

Now, he had been such a jovial chap. He used to be the life of the party, and was at all the parties! So the change was soon noted. On one occasion his old friends teased him for his new-found

faith. But he stood firmly by his principles. He said to them, “Gentlemen, if you will listen patiently, I will tell you why I go to church, and don’t come to your card-table. I went one Sunday evening to hear Mr Cooke. He took for his text, ‘Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him.’ **Your eye** shall see Him!

And that man gave it to them. He brought home that sermon to each one of them personally. He showed them that every eye also meant their eyes. They would all one day be judged by Christ Himself. They never teased him again!

This is why Article 3 ends the way it does, because no one knows the hour or the day. As Paul says in 1st Thessalonians 5 verse 2, the Lord will return like a thief in the night.

So, friend, are you ready? Tomorrow at you work will you warmly show the Lord in? If He turns up tonight at your home will He find you prepared?

We have to be very careful. For we can become somewhat dulled. All this business about wars and rumours of wars, and famines, and earthquakes, and false prophets and false Christ’s has been going on for nearly two thousand years now. We can even slip into living like it’s still ages away. But it’s not! Because the believer lives like it’s going to happen today!

Isn’t that how the Bible itself ends? Revelation 22 verse 20 has these words of the Lord Jesus, “Yes, I am coming soon.” And then the apostle John responds with the believer’s constant sigh, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

May this not only be our prayer, congregation. It must be seen in whatever we do!