

Preview of the Second Coming, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 16:27–28

Code: 2322

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 16:27[en]17:13 is one of the highlights of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples. The sixteenth chapter of Matthew contains some monumental realities. At this point in Christ's ministry it is just a few months until His death. As He moves toward it, He senses a great need to prepare His disciples for what they're going to endure in His death, resurrection, and ascension and their subsequent ministry. In the span of Matthew 16:16-28, He reveals to them that He is the Messiah, that He is building His Kingdom, and that He will die, rise, and finally come again.

REVIEW

I. THE PRINCIPLE (16:24)

II. THE PARADOX (16:25-26)

III. THE PAROUSIA (16:27)

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then He shall reward every man according to his works."

LESSON

Verse 27 is the first clear revelation in the life of our Lord of His Second Coming. His deity, death, resurrection, and eventual return constitute His instruction for the disciples in the few short months before His death. Even though the disciples would hear those lessons again and again, the message didn't sink in until after Christ was gone. The lessons then took on a deeper meaning than when the disciples first heard them.

A. The Glory of the Prophecy

1. Affirming the prophets

The message that the Messiah would come in glory was not new. The Old Testament is filled with

prophecies of it. The Davidic covenant promised there would come a King with an everlasting, glorious Kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-13, 16). Jesus was merely affirming to the disciples the glory the prophets said would come to pass through the Messiah.

2. Encouraging the disciples

The disciples may have lost a sense of the Messiah's glory because of what had occurred in the life of Christ. To date He had not operated according to their Messianic expectations. So the Lord added this significant dimension: the last view the world will have of Jesus Christ is not as a crucified criminal, but as One coming again in full glory. The first time He came He received rejection and hostility, and was executed as a criminal. The second time He will come in glory, majesty, dominion, power and might as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The old hymn "Son of Man to Thee I Cry" says,

He who wept above the grave,
He who stilled the raging wave,
Meek to suffer, strong to save,
He shall come in glory!
He whose sorrows pathway trod,
He that ever good bestowed-- Son of Man and Son of God--
He shall come in glory.
He who bled with scourging sore,
Thorns and scarlet meekly wore,
He who every sorrow bore,
He shall come in glory.
Monarch of the smitten cheek,
Scorn of Jew and scorn of Greek,
Priest and king, divinely meek,
He shall come in glory.
He who died to set us free,
He who lives and loves even me,
He who comes, whom I shall see,
Jesus only--only He--
He shall come in glory.

That is a perspective the disciples needed because the Messianic plan wasn't unfolding the way they expected.

B. The Character of the Prophecy

Matthew 16:27 needs to be seen from two vantage points.

1. As a promise a) To all believers

Verse 27 is a promise to those who believe. The thought of His coming is a promise that fills us with great hope and anticipation. Like John we say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). We are like those who gather under the altar of God and cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10).

b) To the disciples

(1) The conditions of discipleship

In Matthew 16:24 Jesus gives the disciples the conditions of discipleship. If anyone wants to be a Christian--to identify with Him and enter His Kingdom-- he must deny himself, bear his cross, and follow in obedience. Self-denial implies sacrifice--saying no to self and yes to God. We must say no to ease and comfort and yes to a cross--a cross of rejection, persecution, and alienation from the

people of the world. It is a cross we must carry willingly. Finally, we must say yes to loyal obedience at any price.

It is easy to see how excited the disciples must have been when they realized Christ was the Messiah and heard Him say, "I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19). I'm sure they were thinking Christ was going to usher in the Kingdom right away. But then Christ said "he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer ... and be killed" (Matt. 16:21). Then He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Those were some strong realities for the disciples to comprehend. They could see a lot of pain but not much gain, a lot of suffering but not much glory, and a lot of the cross but not much of a crown.

(2) The compassion of the Lord

The Lord understood the disciples' frustration. He never gives any of us more than we can bear. So He said, "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels" (Matt. 16:27). The divine plan hadn't changed--it was still on schedule. Later, the apostle Paul added a footnote to that when he said, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Matthew 16:27 is filled with promise for the disciples and for us, because we, like them, long for the coming of Jesus Christ.

2. As a warning

In Matthew 16:25 Jesus says, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it." If you try to hang on to this world, you will forfeit eternity. In verse 26 He says, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Verse 27 implies a similar warning: What about the people who do not belong to Jesus Christ--who never abandoned themselves, took up their cross, and followed Him? It says, "He shall reward every man according to his works." The Christian eagerly awaits Christ's reappearance because he knows it is a time of reward. The non-Christian vigorously denies or dreads His appearance because he knows it is a time of judgment.

In the vision recorded in Revelation 10:8-11 the apostle John eats the title deed to the earth, which represents the coming of Jesus Christ. He said, "It was in my mouth sweet as honey, and as soon as I had eaten it my belly was bitter" (v. 10). The sweetness is the promise to believers; the bitterness is the warning to the unbelievers. Paul viewed the coming of Christ in the same way. He longed for Jesus to come, yet wrote, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). So we rejoice because Jesus is coming, yet we are sad for the lot of those who don't know Him.

For some Jesus' return ends a life of dying to self, taking up the cross, and living in obedience and brings about eternal rest, riches, and prosperity. For others it brings an end to a life of self-centeredness and self-indulgence, replaced by an eternity of torment, unrest, poverty, and loneliness. Jesus is not discussing any one element of the Second Coming; He is saying in verse 27 that when He comes, everyone will be dealt with. Before Christ's return, the believers are raptured and immediately taken to the judgment seat of Christ, where they receive reward for good they did through the Spirit of God. After His return, the unbelievers are ultimately gathered from out of the land and sea and brought before the great white throne. God as judge then sends them into the second death of everlasting hell. All those elements of judgment are generalized in Matthew 16:27.

C. The Particulars of the Prophecy

1. The context of Christ's coming

a) Verse 27 says that "The Son of man shall come." Why does Jesus call Himself the Son of Man? He used that identification more commonly than any other. It marks His humanness--Jesus was God incarnate. But in the context of verse 27 it has a richer meaning. a) The primary prophecy in Daniel

Beginning at Daniel 7:9, Daniel is looking across the history of the world to its conclusion--all the way to final judgment.

(1) The throne of judgment

Daniel 7:9 says, "I beheld till the thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire." God, who is the Ancient of days, sits in judgment. His garment, white as snow, speaks of His purity. His hair, like pure wool, refers to His wisdom. His throne, like a fiery flame, refers to His majesty. The whirling flames at the foot of the throne represent God's consuming judgment.

Verse 10 says, "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him." Judgment issuing from the throne consumes everything in its path. Verse 10 continues, "A thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand [the angelic hosts] stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened." God's final accounting will be based on objective data. He keeps records, and will look at them on Judgment Day.

(2) The dominion of the Son

Verses 11-12 describe the destruction of the beast--the Satanic world leader. Then in verses 13-14 Daniel says, "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." The Son of man will come in glory to receive the Kingdom and to act in harmony with the Father in judgment.

b) The parallel prophecy in Matthew

Matthew 16:27 is a prophecy similar to Daniel 7:13-14, in that it portrays Jesus as the Son of man returning to judge men on behalf of God. He will take those who belong to Him into His glorious Kingdom, and those who don't belong to Him will be thrown out of the Kingdom forever (Matt. 25:46).

2. The character of Christ's glory

Matthew 16:27 says Christ will "come in the glory of his Father." The word glory is one way to express the attributes, nature, and character of God. Jesus will come as a blazing manifestation of the eternal God.

a) Christ's deity veiled

When Jesus came into the world, His deity was veiled. He was among men, but most didn't know who He was. They didn't receive Him. They saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him (Isa. 53:2).

b) Christ's deity revealed

When Christ returns the veil will be pulled back, and He will come in the glory of His unveiled Father. There will be a full display of His divine attributes.

(1) Exodus 33:18-19--Moses said to God, "Show me thy glory" (v. 18). God replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee, and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (v. 19). Moses wanted to see God's glory, so God showed Moses His attributes (grace and mercy in this case). God's glory is His attributes. God's glory is the manifestation of all He is in holiness.

(2) Matthew 24:29-31--Jesus said that "immediately after the tribulation ... shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (v. 29). Revelation 6:14 says, "The heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together," as blinds might roll up when they slip from your hand. Matthew 24:30-31 say, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet."

Christ will return in the blazing, unveiled glory of God, lighting the whole universe. Men will scream and try to hide from His light. The Bible says that when He touches the earth His glory will fill the earth (Zech. 14:7). He will establish His Kingdom and we will dwell with Him in glory. But those who refuse the Savior will be cast out from His presence forever.

3. The criteria of Christ's judgment

Matthew 16:27 says when Christ comes, He will "reward every man according to his works." On what basis will His judgment be made? On the basis of works. Many people misunderstand what Christ is saying here. They note Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, is the gift of God--not of works, lest any man should boast." Yes, we are saved by faith, but that is a different issue. Scripture also teaches that God will judge all men on the basis of their deeds (e.g., Rom. 2:5-11; 1 Cor. 3:8, 12-13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-8; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). Romans 14:12 says, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

a) The purpose of works

(1) To verify salvation

When Jesus comes in judgment, He "will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). The point is this: your knowledge of Jesus Christ must be evidenced by your good deeds. Works are not the basis of your salvation, but they are the objective verification that you are saved. James said, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). The Lord revealed that truth in Matthew 7:21: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven." On Judgment Day, God will use objective criteria to verify the faith of the redeemed. Those who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior will have no righteous deeds accredited to them because God isn't alive in them to produce them. But God dwells in those who are saved through the Holy Spirit. He produces the good works that prove the transaction really occurred.

(2) To manifest commitment

(a) A righteous heart

Romans 2:7 says, "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." Those who pursue righteousness and seek heavenly glory will receive eternal life. We know that no one will seek such things unless God has regenerated his heart. Romans 3:10-11 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." The person who pursues righteousness and seeks glory in God's Kingdom gives evidence that Christ has changed his heart.

(b) An unrighteous heart

Romans 2:8-11 says, "But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek; for there is no respect of persons with God."

God doesn't whimsically send people into heaven or hell. A person will enter the Kingdom only if there's proof he belongs there! A person who says he is a Christian, but doesn't live like one, has no assurance of ever entering into God's Kingdom.

b) The result of works

(1) The promise

Matthew 16:27 is a promise to those who love Christ. When I look at my life, I have to admit that I fail a lot. And you can say the same thing about your Christian life. Sometimes failure is all we see, and it's hard to find anything good. Then once you find something you did that you think was good, you have just corrupted it: you've injected pride into what originally was a humble act. We all struggle with that. But I have hope because I've given my heart to Jesus Christ, and I know He is producing through me works worthy of God's reward. When I stand before God, the record will show there is

evidence in the life of John MacArthur that God changed his heart.

(2) The warning

No matter how good you may think you are, your goodness is not produced by God unless God lives in you. You can stand before God and say, "I did all these things in your name," but He will say, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:22-23). For the unbeliever, that will be a day of great fear. The best description of it is given by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10: "This is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer, seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when 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, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints." The saints can rest because their glory is coming and unbelievers must fear because vengeance is coming.

D. The Inadequacy of the Prophecy

The prophecy of Christ's second coming was a great encouragement to the disciples, but Christ knew they needed more. They were overwhelmed by their present situation. Their plan wasn't turning out as they hoped. After a brief moment when Christ said He would build His church and give them the keys to the kingdom of heaven, He announced He would die (Matt. 16:18-21). Next He rebuked Peter by saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (v. 23). Then he told them they needed to be willing to die for Him and to bear a cross. All they could envision was hundreds of people walking to their own execution. The things they learned that day were difficult to comprehend. They were not the kinds of things they had expected when they chose to follow Christ. So when Christ told them that glory would come, you can imagine their thinking, "Sure it will!" The prophecy was too remote for them because of their present circumstances. We are like that. We become drowned in the present and view the second coming as an event somewhere off in the distant future. But that perception robs us of the purifying hope that the reality of Christ's return should create in us (1 John 3:3).

To counteract the disciples' frustration, the Lord illustrates His return in a dramatic and unforgettable way. He goes one step further with them because He knows their faith is weak.

IV. THE PREVIEW (16:28; 17:13)

A. The Promise of the Preview (16:28)

"Verily I say unto you, There are some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

1. Interpreted

That verse could lead you to believe that somewhere in this world are some very old men! What does Christ mean? I believe what Christ was saying can be translated, "Some of you standing here will see the Son of Man coming in His royal majesty before you die." The Greek word translated "kingdom" (*basileia*) is used over 160 times in the New Testament. It is correct to render it not only as "Kingdom," but also as "the kingliness of the King" "regal splendor" or "royal majesty." The emphasis in verse 28 is on the coming of the King Himself in His royal majesty.

a) The incorrect interpretations

Some commentators have suggested that Christ was referring to the resurrection--that He would

come out of the grave in royal splendor. Some suggest He was referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost--that the Spirit would come in majesty at the birth of the church. Others say He was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in [sc] A.D. 70, when He judged apostate Israel. Some have even suggested He was referring to a spiritual coming--that Christ enters your heart in regal splendor. It is true that all those things happened, but they don't have anything to do with Matthew 16:28. He couldn't have been referring to the resurrection because it is never expressed by the verb translated "coming." The resurrection is the first step in Christ's ascension to heaven, not His coming from heaven. He couldn't have been referring to Pentecost because the Holy Spirit, not Christ, came then. He couldn't have been referring to the destruction of Jerusalem because He said, "Some of you will see the Son of man," and no one recorded seeing Him at the destruction. Finally, there is no justification for a mystical interpretation of verse 28 because the following context makes clear the meaning of the verse.b) The correct interpretation

Unfortunately a chapter break was made by the translators at a point where it is important to follow the flow of the text. This same promise in Matthew 16:28 also appears in Mark and Luke. In all three cases it is immediately followed by the same incident, but in Mark (9:1-13) and Luke (9:27- 36), it is not followed by a chapter break. What the Lord was referring to in Matthew 16:28 is interpreted by the event that follows. Three of the disciples were about to have a private showing of Christ's glory.

An Overview of the Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1 says, "After six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John, his brother." Those were the three who saw Christ in His regal splendor before their deaths. Matthew's narrative continues, "[Jesus] bringeth them up into an high mountain privately, and was transfigured before them; and his face did shine like the sun, and His raiment was as white as the light" (vv. 1-2). God flipped a switch and turned on deity from within Christ! To add to this scene "there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three booths; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were very much afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, except Jesus only" (vv. 3-8).

What an experience! The three disciples accompanied Jesus on a little retreat up the mountain. Luke says they were sleeping and Jesus was praying (Luke 9:29, 32). During the prayer and just as the disciples were coming out of their sleep, Jesus pulled back the veil and gave them a display of the glory He had promised them. They were terrified. And add to that the voice of God and the presence of Moses and Elijah! They were overwhelmed. What the disciples saw was a preview of the Second Coming. Every single detail of the preview depicts an element of the Second Coming.

2. Internalized

a) By Peter

That preview changed Peter's life. Don't worry about your pain or suffering; Jesus is coming--that became the theme of his epistles. The one thing Peter knew Jesus would do was return, and the resurrection verified it. He regressed some when Jesus died, but was strengthened by the resurrection. The Second Coming became his great anticipation. I believe he was consumed with it. In 2 Peter 1:16-18 he says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God, the Father, honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." When Peter preached about the Second Coming, he wasn't talking about something he hoped would happen; he knew it would

happen because he had a preview of it.

b) By John

In John 1:14 John says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

Peter and John saw the partially unveiled glory of God in the transfiguration, and they wrote about it. James didn't write about it that we know of, but I'm sure he talked about it.

Conclusion

The Lord is so gracious. He didn't just say He was going to come; He gave a preview of what His coming would be like. He encouraged Moses similarly, proclaiming, "It shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Ex. 33:22-23). Moses then was assured God would lead him.

Christ didn't display His glory for the three disciples' benefit only: it is for our benefit as well. In 2 Peter 3:3-7 Peter says, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, by which the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." Peter concludes that in knowing all these things, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness?" (v. 11). Jesus is coming. What kind of person ought you to be? You will be judged by your works. God is keeping records, and there is no escape. For those of us who love the Lord Jesus Christ, there is sweetness in His coming. It is a promise filled with hope. But for those who do not know Jesus Christ, will be terror and anguish.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Explain how the disciples could have lost a sense of the Messiah's future glory.
2. What two perspectives can Matthew 16:27 be viewed from?
3. Why was Matthew 16:27 so crucial for the disciples to hear?
4. Explain the significance Matthew 16:27 has for unbelievers.
5. Why does Jesus refer to Himself as the Son of man in Matthew 16:27?
6. Daniel 7:9 gives a description of God. What attributes are symbolized in that description?
7. How is Matthew 16:27 similar to the prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14?

8. What word can be used to express the attributes, nature, and character of God?
9. Why didn't most of the world recognize Christ's deity when He first came to earth? How will they recognize His deity when He returns?
10. What is the criteria God will use when He judges all men (see Matt. 16:27)? Cite some verses that support that fact.
11. Why does God use this criteria in His judgment of man?
12. Explain how the Christian can have hope in his ultimate reward despite the failures he sees in his life.
13. Why is Matthew 16:27 both sweet and bitter?
14. Why did the Lord give a preview of His second coming in addition to the prophecy in verse 27?
15. What are other ways to translate the Greek word translated "kingdom" in Matthew 16:28?
16. What are some of the incorrect interpretations of Matthew 16:28? Why are they incorrect?
17. Where can you find the correct interpretation of Matthew 16:28?
18. How did the transfiguration of Christ change Peter's life?

Pondering the Principles

1. As a Christian, you have great hope for the future because Christ will come in glory to reward you. But what about those who don't know Christ? Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 and 2 Peter 3:7. According to those verses, what does the future hold for unbelievers? Read 2 Corinthians 5:11. What kind of attitude did Paul have toward unbelievers? It is important that you develop that same attitude. If you know of some unbelievers you need to persuade, begin to do so. But remember, don't try to save them yourself. First, ask God to work in their hearts to prepare them to receive the gospel. Be faithful to use the opportunities God gives you for sharing the gospel. Don't presume on God's patience in delaying the return of Christ (2 Peter 3:9-10). Use the time He has given you.
2. The disciples became discouraged when Christ told them about the heavy requirements of discipleship. The same can be true of us. But Matthew 16:27 serves to encourage us as well as the disciples. To begin developing a better perception of Christ's return, look up the following verses: Matthew 24:29-31, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, 1 John 3:2-3, and Revelation 19-20. Record all your observations of what that time will be like. Meditate on those things and develop a mental picture of the glory to come. Choose the verse most meaningful to you and memorize it for future times of discouragement.

3. Read 2 Peter 3:11. As a result of what you have learned from this study, what kind of person should you be? Record these attitudes and actions you need to develop. Ask God's guidance in implementing them in your life.

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