

The When and The Then

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[0 : 0 0] And I'd like us to think one of the while this evening about this verse 31 that we read in Matthew 25. When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

And we have here these two terms which we might refer to as the when and the then. When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

And the one we might say is a prospect. It is looking forward to something which is promised. It is a promise in anticipation. When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

You might say that the then is also anticipatedly, that it is also a promise in anticipation, but really it is stated as though it is a promise accomplished.

We have a promise in anticipation and we have a promise accomplished. When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

[1 : 1 4] Now, we might say that part of the difficulty is for us in grasping this distinction is that this is still future. You know, the Lord is prophesying this, he's saying it to his disciples, he's giving it in his teaching, and they're both future.

You know, when the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. But not the one statement follows on the other insofar as because the one is promised, the other is assured.

And we might say that although we think in terms of past, present, and future, we think in terms of time as linear, which in terms of God's creation within the spheres of time, that is the case.

But to God, who is an eternal being, all past, present, and future, all events, what we might refer to as time, is in the very palm of his hand.

The future, however many thousands of years it may be ahead of us, is just as present to him and to his sight as thousands of years ago in the past, as is indeed the very present moment.

[2 : 2 2] Because past, present, and future are all in the palm of his hand. He is an eternal being. And therefore, everything that he has done, everything that he has promised and prophesied, is done in an eternal context.

It is in the context of eternity that he has prophesied and promised that such and such will happen at this point, and then it will be followed by this, and then it will be followed by something else.

And because these assurances and this law, if you like, of God's providence has been established in an eternal context, there is nothing in this sphere of time which can derail it.

There is nothing that can happen in this veil of time which can alter or skew or can in any way upset or destroy that which the Lord has himself not only prophesied but also promised.

There is the when and there is the then. And the one is as certain as the other. We have a promise in anticipation and we have a promise fulfilled.

[3 : 31] Oh, of course, the Lord has used these terms in his inspired word. Sometimes one of them in isolation, sometimes the other. Quite often the two will come together with the same kinds of certainty.

We think way back to the book of Judges when the great victory was given to Gideon and he was following up on that victory and chasing his enemies. And we read in Judges chapter 8 from verse 4.

And the princes of Saphoth said, And that was his promise.

And that, of course, is exactly what came to pass. It was a promise of judgment. It was a promise of, you might say, the fierceness of his wrath. But the fierceness of his wrath was in the context of mercy being withheld from his people because of the unbelief of those who ought to have been on his side.

The men of Saphoth were Israelites. They were on the other side of Jordan, but they were Israelites. They ought to be supporting those Israelites which had delivered the land out of the hands of the Midianites.

[5 : 10] But, no, they're not going to give their bread to these men of Gideon because the Zeba and Zalmunalek come back again. And then they might punish them for a minute. They didn't have certainty.

They didn't have faith in the Lord's deliverance. Even though he had already begun to work a great victory through Gideon and his 300 men. They were following up on that victory, but still that wasn't enough.

The victory had begun to unfold, but still it wasn't enough for them. So Gideon says, therefore, when the Lord delivered Zeba and Zalmunalek into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with brows.

You see, there's no doubt in Gideon's mind about the certainty of the outcome. And, of course, the Lord exactly brings that to pass. He went up to Peniel and spake unto them, likewise, and the men of Peniel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him.

And he spake unto the men of Peniel, saying, when I come again in peace, I will break down this tower. We might have inserted, then I will break down this tower. It's the same implication.

[6 : 13] Then he will bring to pass that judgment upon those who have rejected mercy towards him and his men. And if we were to read on into chapter 8 of Judges, that is exactly what we would find happening.

The certainty of what had been prophesied came to pass in its certainty because, of course, that which God has ordained, that which the Lord has promised, will come to pass.

Now, the when that we have is, it's not simply a promise in anticipation. It is also an expression of trust, if you like.

It is the certainty of a promise when the Son of Man shall come in his glory. Jesus uses, of course, the parable of the good Samaritan. And the Samaritan himself, towards the end of the parable, as you'll remember, no doubt, when he brings the wounded man to the innkeeper.

And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two penstars, two days' wages for a labourer and gave them to the host. And Samaritan, take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay him.

[7 : 19] And the clear implication, the clear teaching in that parable is that the good Samaritan is going to return that way again. By implication, he has done business with this innkeeper in the past.

He has regularly stopped at that inn. He has regularly paid his dues. When he pays two days' wages now to the innkeeper to look after this wounded man, this complete and total stranger, he says, Take the money.

If you spend more than that, you need to spend more than that. I'll settle up. When will I come again? And the fact of the certainty of what he has been in the past, cobbles us the innkeeper.

We're reading this into the parable. You could say, but Jesus doesn't imply anything less. And it implies the certainty that he will come again and settle his bill.

Because of the consistency of the past, there is the guarantee of the future. And this, of course, is again exactly what the Lord himself is like. Whenever the Lord wants Israel or his people, the church, to trust in them for the future, he appeals to their experience of the past.

[8 : 26] They think, we think, inevitably, in terms of linear times, we said. Past, present, future, moving in a straight line. Genesis to Revelation. There's a beginning. There's an end. There's everything in the line in between.

We don't think in terms of time as circular the way that some other religions do. Think of your endless reincarnations. It's sort of a hamster's wheel that's always going round and round and never really having a beginning or an end in whatever.

No. Time, as the Bible reveals it, is linear for us who are in time. There is a beginning. There's an outcome. There's an end. And the Bible describes both the beginning and the end.

But God is beyond time. He is himself eternal. But when he wants to reassure his people about the certainty of what he has promised, he appeals to the past in order to point them to the future.

He says, look at how I have been. Look at how I have delivered my people out of Egypt or out of the hands of the Assyrians or the Babylonians. How I have been is how I will always be.

[9 : 33] I am always consistent. I do not change. I am the Lord. Malachi chapter 3 and verse 6. I change not. Therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

As we have it in Hebrews chapter 13. Of Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever. It is an unchanging God. As he has been, therefore he shall be.

Now what do we find in this Matthew 25? Where we have the Lord's wrath revealed against who? Against those who have withheld mercy. Just like Gideon and the book of Judges though.

His wrath was against those who withheld mercy from those who needed it. Who engaged in a work of deliverance and the Lord's work. But the mercy that is needed here in Matthew 25 is not necessary for those who are powerful and victorious in battle.

It is just for those who are in need. And the point is that those who see no requirement for them to relieve the needy or to help the poor.

[10 : 37] Or to visit the sick in prison or whatever it might be. They don't see any burden of conscience on that. It is because they do not think in terms of compassion or of the fear of the Lord.

Or those who may likewise be the Lord's creatures or even the Lord's children. By adoption or whatever. They think only in terms of number one. Only in terms of the idolatry of the self.

And I would suggest to you that we peel away the layers of the scripture. That is really what so much boils down to. Not only in this parable. Well it's not really a parable. It's a prophecy in Matthew 25 there.

But the whole division in scripture really. Old Testament and New. Boils down to this. The idolatry of the self. Over against the worship of the true God.

Where there is the worship of the true God. There is the fear of the Lord. Which is the beginning of wisdom. The knowledge of the holy is understanding. You know we find again and again in scripture.

[11 : 37] Where like Joseph says to his brothers. You know. This do because I fear God. He's not going to be cruel to his brothers. Even though they've been bad to him. Because he fears God.

Because the fear of the Lord is in his heart. So he is moved to show kindness and compassion. To those who don't really deserve it. Because we have the fear of the Lord.

We are moved to show pity and compassion. To the poor. To the needy. To help those who but for the grace of God. We might be in their situation. And likewise in this Matthew 25.

You peel away the layers. And this is what you find. The idolatry of the self. Oh Lord if we'd known it was you. Of course we would have helped you. Of course we would have fed you.

Or visited you in prison. Of course we would have done something for you. Because that would have been to our advantage. Because we would have recognised. Yes this is an important person. This is Jesus the King of Kings.

[12 : 32] Of course there's an interest for us. In helping him. But not these riffraff. Not the scum of the earth. Not the poor. The needy. The offscoutings of the world. What can they advantage us?

No point us wasting resources on them. You know. They can't help us. Are the hands of Zeba and Zolmuda. Already in your hand. That you want our bread. Can these people help me.

That I should give my food. My water. My money. To those who are. Are they me. Oh I can't waste time with them. Because I have more important things to do. Because I am more important.

Than the fear of the Lord. The idolatry of self. Over against the worship of the true God. That's what this chapter really. The latter part of it. Amounts to. But still we have here.

The certainty of the promise. And then the accomplishment of the promise. When the Son of Man shall come in his glory. And all the holy angels with him. Then shall he sit upon the throne.

[13 : 31] Of his glory. Now certainty that is promised. We find it as we say. Other occasions. We've got a when. Without a then. And when Jesus speaks to Peter. Of course. You know.

Simon. Simon. Satan. Hath desired to have you. That he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee. That thy faith will not. And when thou art converted.

Strengthen thy breath. Now of course. Not every believer. Necessarily agrees on. When is the definition. Of when Peter became. Converted or changed. Or empowered. Or whatever it might be.

That he was able to be. A strengthening to his brethren. Some might take it as being. Pentecost. Others might take it as being. After the resurrection. When Jesus appears to him. Personally. Whensuever it might be.

There comes a point. At which. Peter is transformed. And in his position. To lead. To strengthen. To be an empowering influence. To his brethren.

[14 : 25] Jesus. Prays for this. When thou art converted. And because the Lord. Who is eternal. Asks for it. Then that which is eternal. Is imposed.

Or influencing. Upon that which is. Within the veil of time. We in time. Cannot get. Out there. To change the eternal. But the eternal.

Influences it upon us. In the veil of time. When. Thou art converted. Strengthen my brethren. When the son of man. Shall come in his glory. And all the holy angels.

With him. Then shall he sit. Upon the throne. Of his glory. It is an accomplished. Fact. That is referred to. It is promised. But it is also. Accomplished.

And the certainty. Of the one. Likewise. The certainty. Of the other. Now. Because we haven't. Been to heaven. We can't say. For sure. Who is there.

[15 : 19] And who isn't. But likewise. We need to be. Very very bold. In order to say. Well Jesus. Was actually. Telling lies. Or he didn't know. Who he was talking to. When. He addresses. The thief on the cross.

Who says. Lord remember me. When thou comest. Into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him. Verily I say unto thee. Today. Shalt thou be. With me. In paradise.

The thief says. When. Thou comest. Into thy kingdom. Here is. The certainty. Here is the faith. That takes it. As a promise. Effectively accomplished.

This man. Who is being crucified. Beside me. I believe. That he is a king. That he has a kingdom. That he is about to enter. Into this kingdom. When. Thou comest.

Into thy kingdom. Lord remember me. When. Thou comest. Into thy kingdom. Jesus said unto him. Verily I say unto thee. Today. Shalt thou be with me. In paradise. The when.

[16 : 14] Is accomplished. In the word of Jesus. And it is accomplished. That very day. Jesus of course. Expires. Before the other. Thieves on the cross. They get their legs broken.

They die. But they die. The same day. When. Thou comest. Into thy kingdom. Remember me. And likewise. Of course. We have in the. The promises. In the Psalms.

Of when. The Lord. Turned again. The captivity of Zion. We were like them. The dream. Then was our mouth. Filled with laughter. And our time. With singing. These are.

Looking back. To a promise. That was fulfilled. And rejoicing in it. When the Lord. Turned again. Past. Hence. The captivity of Zion. We were like them.

That dream. Then was our mouth. Filled with laughter. And again. We have. We have. One of these terms. In a sense. Without the other. In Isaiah 35. Looking ahead.

[17 : 07] To this. Fulfillment. That is promised. And prophesied. In Isaiah 35. Then the eyes. Of the blind. Shall be opened. And the ears. Of the deaf. Shall be unstopped.

Then. Shall a lame man. Leap us in heart. And the tongue. Of the dumb. Sing. For in the wilderness. Shall waters break out. And streams. In the desert. When will that be accomplished? When the Lord.

Brings to pass. His word. Then. Shall the lame man. Leap us in heart. Then. Shall the eyes. Of the blind. Be opened. The Lord. Brings to pass. That which. He has.

Promised. He does not. Fail. His people. Remember. What Peter says. The Lord. Is not slack. Concerning. His promise. You know. One day. Is what the Lord.

Is a thousand years. And a thousand years. Is one day. Because time. Is not that. Which. Is the same for us. It's not the same. That way with the Lord. Because he's an eternal being.

[18 : 02] The Lord. Is not slack. Concerning his promise. As some men count slackness. But is long. Suffering to us. Not willing. That any should perish. But that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord. Will come as a thief in the night. In which the heavens. Shall pass away. With a great noise. And the elements. Shall melt. With fervent heat. The earth also.

And the works. That are therein. Shall be burned up. Now. I am not yet. Retired. But I imagine. Some of you will be. And you'll no doubt.

Remember back. In terms of your. Working days. And you'll think. In terms of. Well. All the years. You were working away. Whatever job was. And you always felt. You know. You copped up so many years.

There were so many still to go. You know. Well. Working down towards retirement now. So many years to go. And then. Then suddenly. Boom. Suddenly one day. It happened. One day.

[18 : 56] The retirement was real. And all the years. Of labour and service. And thought they were behind you. They're never going to. Come back. Yes. You can go back. And fill in a bit here. Or there. Help out somebody else.

Who's doing the same job. As you've got the skills for. But you're never going to go back again. Into that profession full time. That was it. All the years that you were unable to give. All the years that you were unable to serve.

And it seemed so long. And sometimes the treadmill seemed so discouraging. You got through it. And you worked on. There were good days. There were bad days. Maybe you were looking forward to your safe time.

And then. Boom. Suddenly. One day that was it. One day suddenly. It falls. And although you know it's coming. And although maybe you've longed for it. Or looked forward to it.

Or counted down towards it. Suddenly. Boom. That's it. And everything then is behind you. I would suggest to you. Although it's not happened yet.

[19 : 50] So you can't say. Look. That's exactly what it's like. But you know. The Lord describes his coming. As a thief in the night. He describes it as something. That when it happens. No matter how well you're prepared for it.

Or how much you look forward to it. Or you anticipate it. It still. Comes as almost a surprise. Perhaps as a complete shock.

To some people. When it does happen. No amount of preparedness means. That that moment meets you. Yes. Of course. This is precisely the right moment.

Indeed. I just slide into this moment. I'm completely fulfilled. No. There's always that sense of. Oh. Is that it now? I didn't think it would be yet. I wasn't quite prepared for that.

It's come so suddenly. Suddenly. That's it. It's all fulfilled. It's all happened. When the Lord comes back. He will come back. With a finality. That will end everything else.

[20 : 45] All that went before. All the opportunities. To get right with the Lord. All the opportunities. To make your peace. With those you might have fallen out with. To settle all your debts.

And do all your stuff. And make sure all the loose ends. Were tied up. That's not going to be the case anymore. There won't be any more opportunity. To do these things. Now is the time you have to do them.

Now is the hour of grace. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the chance. To get right with the Lord. Now is the chance. To make your peace with the Lord. And with those. With whom you might have fallen out.

Because the Lord. Will be able. When he comes back. To say. Look. You can't say. You didn't tell me. Oh. Yes. I know Lord. But you said you were coming. And you said you were coming.

And you said you were coming. And it didn't happen. And it didn't. So for 2,000 years. You've been saying you're coming. Yes. I've been warning you for 2,000 years. That I was coming again. And then when I come again.

[21 : 40] You can't say you weren't warned. Oh. I just didn't think you were coming yet. Well. I didn't. And I didn't. And I didn't. And I didn't. And you had all this time. You had all these years.

You had all these opportunities. And then one day. Boom. That was it. And the opportunities have gone. And ceased. Time slips through our fingers.

Friends. We are entrusted with this commodity. Not unlike the talents that are described in the earlier part of this passage here. Time is a commodity with which we are entrusted.

Some are given an awful lot. Five talents. Some are given a medium amount. Two talents. Some will be given one. But the point is that we have this rich and blessed commodity.

And we may not have it for very long. And every single one of us can testify to the fact of how quickly it is gone. It may be a lifetime of service in a particular profession.

[22 : 37] It may be the lifetime of a child that you have brought up the adult route. And it seemed only a moment ago that they were an infant. Or maybe you're looking in the mirror. And seeing yourself old and thinking, when did that happen?

How did that happen so sad? I was just starting out. And my life would seem like a moment ago. I was starting out on my new career or my new profession. How did I suddenly get old? Inside I'm one of the young people.

Inside I'm one of these people that's going to do things and change the world. And show the old people that us youngsters, oh we've got it in it now to change the world. But now the real youngsters look around at me and they think, oh you're one of the old people.

But I don't feel it inside. But that's what we have become. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye. When the Lord makes a promise, he brings it to pass.

Time which seems so extensive. It's really just the blink of an eye. We don't get much of it. But what we do get, we are to make good.

[23 : 37] When the Son of Man shall come in his glory. And all the holy angels with him. Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. That which he has prophesied and promised. That which is a promise in anticipation.

Is to all intents and purposes a promise accomplished. We may trust the certainty of what the Lord has given. Or at the very least, like the men of Succoth or the men of Penuel.

We may have to ask. Do you believe that Gideon has this victory in his hand? Do you believe that that which he has been enabled to begin.

He will complete. He's done the difficult thing. Of beating the Midianites with a mere 300 men. Why do you think that chasing his enemies now is going to be beyond him? The Lord has done the difficult thing.

In overcoming death. And rising again victorious over the grave. He has done the difficult thing. In providing and fulfilling that perfect sinless life.

[24 : 40] That representative of a fallen humanity. To being our redeemed humanity. By a perfect offering of a perfect life. And then sacrificing that perfect life on the cross for all who believe in him.

That's the difficult thing. Coming back in power and glory. In which he's already seated and enthroned with all his heavenly hosts around him. If we may use a term that doesn't sound reverent.

But to the Lord. It's a dawdle. Coming back again is the easy bit. Coming again in glory. That's easy compared to all that he went through in his life and death.

Crucifixion and resurrection. Why do we think he's not going to accomplish that when he's done the difficult thing? But the promise is that he shall.

When the Son of Man shall come in his glory. Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. He's done the difficult thing. He's going to do the easy thing. You can be sure.

[25 : 44] And for now. Once that promise is in the full time. We have this brief snapshot of time. Whilst we're rapidly aging before our very eyes.

To ensure that we serve him with every opportunity that we have. That whether it be a five or a two or a one in the tats. That that be put to use.

That it be put to work. That it serve the Lord with what we have. And we all of us. All of us. Feel. Oh but what little can I do. What use is anything I've done.

I haven't accomplished much in my life. But still what we are given. We are required to put to work. To are required to put to the work. And to the service of the Lord.

And we may not think in terms of it being spectacular. We may think of it only in terms of a very ordinary thing. Oh anybody could do that. Anybody could do that. If that's not a special gift.

[26 : 44] Yes but the point is that we do it. You know when the Lord said. And criticized those in this prophecy. Or this parable. If you can call it that. It says oh well I was in prison.

And you didn't visit me. I was sick. And you didn't help me. I was naked. You didn't clothe me. These are not difficult things to do. They're not rocket science. For which you need a PhD in astrophysics.

Or something like that. They're just ordinary common or garden things. That anybody is able to do. The point is they didn't do that. The point is they didn't think it was important enough to do.

Because if they'd known it was Jesus. Well that would have been a big deal. But it is for the poor. Just for the ordinary souls. And the point is that we never know. Who it is. How important the person that we help.

Or support. Or encourage. Or are kind to. How important that person may end up proving to be. The fact is the Lord has created each one of them. Every single one of them is an immortal soul.

[27 : 44] And those who end up being redeemed. Will be our brothers and sisters in Christ. For all eternity. And those who end up being lost. Will at least have got a little kindness.

From somebody who was. A follower of Christ. Because the certainty of this coming to pass. Is already promised. When the Son of Man shall come.

Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. There is no doubt. There is no question. Because like we say. The men of succor. Of all that boils down to this.

Do you believe. The promises of God. Do you believe. The word of God. Or for us we might say. Especially in the context.

Of this parable. Do you believe. The Son of God. Let us pray.