

13. The Meaning of History as an encounter with the Son of Man

Matthew 24 - 25



These two chapters, Matthew's fifth and final discourse, are a commentary on the final statement of chapter twenty-three: 'You will not see me again until you say, **"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord"**' (Matthew 23:39). From the beginning, Matthew has presented Jesus as Israel's Shepherd-Messiah. Here, in the final discourse, Matthew wants to reflect upon God's just verdict on the whole of human history - the ultimate 'Day of the Lord'. As we will see this judgment is determined by the way we respond to our encounter with the Son of Man.

Kingdom of God : God's Action in History

Discipleship : Welcoming and Mediating this action

Matthew 21:1 - 24:2

Matthew 24-25

Matthew 26-28

Judgment of Religion

Death & Resurrection



The Meaning of History as an
Encounter with the Son of Man

Parousia : Presence in History of the Son of Man

Eschatological : Ultimate Judgment

Apocalyptic : Revelatory Vision

The experience that gave rise to the “Eschatological Discourse” appears to be the experience of Mark’s community in Rome of Nero’s persecution and the Jewish war. Mark’s text is strongly influenced by the Book of Daniel. Matthew’s community is reproducing, adapting and expanding Mark’s material.

In regard to Matthew’s text ‘it is especially difficult to say in which sections of the text the readers saw statements about the past, in which they saw their own experiences, and in which they saw predictions of the future’ (Luz, volume 3. 184).

It is Matthew's belief that, at the moment of our death, Jesus will be present to each of us. In that encounter we will be revealed for who we really are, and for what we have chosen to become by the free choices we have made. Jesus, as the Son of Man, has identified with us in our human condition, especially in its fragility and suffering and oppression. He has identified with us. The question is: Have we identified with him? Have we heeded his words? Have we believed the good news and chosen accordingly?

Part 1. Signs of the coming of the Son of Man
and of the end of the age : Matthew 24:3-31

Disciples' question : Matthew 24:3 (Mark 13:3-4)

When he was **sitting** (5:1; 13:2) **on the Mount of Olives**,
the disciples came to him privately, saying,

1. 'Tell us, when will this be (24:2 - destruction of Jerusalem),
2. and what will be the sign (σημείον) *of your coming* (παρουσία)
and of the end (συντελεία) *of the age?*'

Matthew's community is no longer interested in when Jerusalem will be destroyed, as it has already happened. Matthew includes this question since he found it in his source (Mark). It is the second question that interests the disciples.

First warning against false prophets : Matthew 24:4-5 (Mark 13:5-6)

Jesus answered them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the *Messiah!*’ (members of the community prophesying falsely in the name of the risen Lord) **and they will lead many astray.**

These are not signs of the parousia : Matthew 24:6-8 (Mark 13:7-8)

And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.

Experiences of division within the community : Matthew 24:9-12

Then they will hand you over to the **tribulation** (θλίψις) and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another.

And many **false prophets** (2) will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.

Tribulation = the final great anguish of the end time that was expected in apocalypticism before the great inbreaking of the new age.

Matthew 24:13-14 (Mark 13:13, 10)

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations (see Matthew 29:19); *and then the end* (τέλος) will come.

Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem

Matthew 24:15-22 (Mark 13:14-20)

So when you see the desolating sacrilege (see 23:38) *standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel* (9:27; 11:31; 12:11) (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; the one on the housetop must not go down to take what is in the house; the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a **sabbath**. For at that time there will be great tribulation (θλίψις, 24:9), such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Jewish Christians still observing the **sabbath**

Matthew 24:23-25 (Mark 13:21-23)

Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’ – do not believe it. For false messiahs and **false prophets** (3) will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Take note, I have told you beforehand.

Matthew 24:26

So, if they say to you, ‘Look! He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look! He is in the inner rooms,’ **do not believe it.**

Matthew 24:27 (Luke 17:24)

For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the **coming** (παρουσία) of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:28 (Luke 17:37)

Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

'Son of Man' : Daniel 7 Vision

1. Empires from Babylon to Antiochus IV as beasts from the sea (chaos)
2. God on throne of judgment. 'The books were opened'(7:9)
3. Daniel 7:13-14 'As I watched in the night vision, I saw someone in human likeness [like a son of man] coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion: glory and kingship. Every people, nation, and language must serve him. His dominion is to be everlasting, never passing away; his kingship never to be destroyed.'
4. Daniel 7:27 'The kingship and dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High. Their kingly rule will last forever, and all dominions will serve and obey them.'

‘Signs’ : Matthew 24:29 (Mark 13:24-25)

Immediately after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.

‘The stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light’(Isaiah 13:10).

‘All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall wither’(Isaiah 34:4).

The coming of the Son of Man : Matthew 24:30-31 (Mark 13:26-27)

*Then the **sign** (σημείον) of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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.*

The sign is the revelation of the Son of Man

'As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him' (Daniel 7:13).

'The Lord himself will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever' (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Like YHWH, the Son of Man (the exalted Jesus) is enthroned on the clouds:

‘You set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers’ (Psalm 104:3-4).

‘Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen’ (Revelation 1:7).

‘There will be no more signs that will give people a last-minute warning; that is a hoax proclaimed only by the false prophets. The only “sign” is the Son of Man himself. He will appear suddenly and as unmistakably as a lightning bolt in the sky; and the surprised nations of the earth will wail when they see him coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Luz, volume 3, 202).

Part 2. Final admonitions to the Church Matthew 24:32 - 25:30

God's final judgment is imminent : Matthew 24:32-35 (Mark 13:28-31)

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things (24:15), you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place (16:28; 24:29). Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The timing is known only to God : Matthew 24:36 (Mark 13:32)

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Matthew 24:37-41 (Luke 17:26-27; 34-35)

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

So we must be vigilant (1) : Matthew 24:42 (Mark 13:33)

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Matthew 24:43-44 Luke 12:39-40)

But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

We must be vigilant (2) : Matthew 24:45-51 (Luke 12:41-46)

Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions.

But if that wicked slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards.

The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, *where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

We must be vigilant (3): Parable of the ten bridesmaids Matthew 25:1-9

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their torches (λαμπάς) and went to meet the bridegroom (9:15; 22:2-14). Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their torches, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their torches. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept (in the bride's house). But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their torches (pouring oil on the rags). The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our torches are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

Matthew 25:10-13

And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'

Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Parable of the talents Matthew 25:14-21 (compare Luke 19:12-17)

For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents (6,000 denarii), to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Matthew 25:22-23

And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Matthew 25:24-30

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

(8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13)

What ultimately matters (the final judgment) Matthew 25:31-46

Matthew 25:31-36

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him (see 16:27; 24:30), then he will sit on the throne of his glory (19:28). All the nations (28:19) will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the **king** will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Matthew 25:37-40

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’

And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family (see 12:49-50), you did it to me.’

The focus of the parable is on judgment of Jesus’ disciples (see Galatians 6:10). But not exclusively. We are to love our enemies (5:43-44).

Matthew 25:41-46

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

‘For Matthew the enabling foundation of his theology is not apocalyptic eschatology but Jesus, the “God with us” in history. The apocalyptic dimension of his eschatology only helps to indicate what the consequences are for life and death and what it means for the future of the entire world that in the midst of the world “God [is] with us.”(Luz 3.297)

What we choose to do matters!