

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You reign over all things in glorious majesty, and we praise You. Stir our hearts to sustain our praise through every waking moment of our lives. If we are downhearted, may we still honour the awesome love of Christ who died for us, and if we are excited, may we accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit in directing our energies wisely. Bind our lives to Yours, Lord God Almighty; we praise You! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

- *Pray for those whose lives are lost and who need to find a Saviour*
- *Pray for those who do not know they are lost and need guidance*
- *Pray for all who fight against Christianity and see it as an evil*
- *Pray for philosophers who dismiss Jesus and the existence of God*
- *Pray for people of other faiths who have never heard about Christ*
- *Pray for agnostics who readily confess they do not understand faith*

Meditation

If I walk in my own way, Lord Jesus, then:

I will become self centred and insensitive,
I will learn to enjoy arrogance and pride;
I will speak what I think, without care for others;
I will become spiritually blind and weak.

If I walk in Your way, Lord Jesus, then:

I will be fulfilled by living for others, and You,
I will grow up in the counsel of Almighty God
I will receive instruction from the Word of Life;
I will gain strength from on high to do right.

For it is certain and I cannot ignore it:

I will end up walking one way, not the other;
I may try to do both, but this will not succeed,
My own path has only one end, which is death,
But the path of Jesus will lead to glory, and life.

Bible Study - Matthew 24:1-3

¹ Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. ² 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every single one will be thrown down.'

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?'

Reflections

Misunderstanding is fact of life. It is common to find that in the middle of a conversation, we will completely misunderstand something said to us because our thoughts are running along a very different track to the person speaking to us. An example of this is found in Matthew 24, and it is a brief incident that happened at the end of the day when Jesus had entered Jerusalem.

A few days before Jesus' death, he came into Jerusalem on a donkey and went straight to the Temple, where he turned over the tables of the money changers and was challenged by the religious authorities (Matt 21-23). After these extraordinary events, Jesus left Jerusalem to return to Bethany, via the Mount of Olives, and he looked back in sorrow, knowing that the earthly glories of His own people would soon fade, saying '*I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every single one will be thrown down*' (Matt 24:2). Jesus was heartbroken at the rejection of God's will by His own people.

The disciples, however, had different things on their minds. For them, the day was full of excitement, for it had begun with something they had longed to see. Their master and Lord, Jesus, had made his entry into Jerusalem in a manner that reminded people of David, the great Saviour of Israel, and they thought Jesus was about to fulfil all that the prophets said about God's Messiah! Unfortunately, in their excitement, they missed the emotional signals that would have told them that Jesus was far from happy, so when Jesus made this comment about the destruction of Jerusalem, they misunderstood Him. They thought He was about to reveal Himself and believed God was about to establish His reign in glory, so they said, '*when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*' (Matt 24:3).

When Jesus replied to the disciples (Matt 24:4f.), he graciously answered them directly, but if we read all that Jesus says about the end of the age and the coming glory of God's Kingdom, we will find that it is tinged with Jesus' deep sorrow at the failure of his own people to understand Him or acknowledge Him.

I could have taken almost any number of incidents from the life of Jesus as an example of the lack of understanding between the disciples and Jesus. Almost every Gospel story is characterised by misunderstanding; for example, the disciples chased the children away from Jesus before He said '*bring them to me ...*' (Matt 19:13f.), and when the three disciples saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain, they asked him whether he wanted a tent built (Matt 17:1)!

It would be wrong of us to distance ourselves from the disciples, by believing that we would certainly not make such mistakes. In truth, we do the same, and we are just as ignorant of the things of God, in our own way. I make this statement not merely as an observation, but because in the disciples, Scripture presents us with a picture of our own relationship with the Lord. He calls them and they respond in faith, just as He does to us today. He asks them to accompany Him on the journey of life, just as He does today. He leads them through His own death to resurrection glory, just as He does for us today.

Now the message of this passage today is that although we may have our eyes and our hearts set on what we think God may do in this world, like the disciples, we have probably got it wrong. Much of God's church is set on trying to grow churches and evangelise, and much energy is poured into this. Effort is concentrated in this way because in many Western countries the church is on the decline, and out of our guilt we believe that we must work hard to fill churches and make the Christian voice heard again in our world.

I would be hard put to criticise such effort, but I do suggest that we may be operating on an agenda that does not reflect God's will for our times. In some parts of the world, the church is on the decline because faith has been compromised in the midst of the development of western culture, and many Christians are unable to see any difference between their own lifestyle and the demands of Christian discipleship. Whatever effort is expended, the church will not grow there unless those who profess to be Christians rediscover their faith and live not just a different and new lifestyle, but the authentic life of Christ. The Lord God asks that our spirits are pure and dedicated to Him, first of all, so that He can then use us for His will.

The Lord God Almighty has not changed. He still looks for people who will cast all things aside and follow Him with a radical discipleship and way of life based upon His moral authority and His exclusive guidance. For all our energy, our books, our money-spinning productions, rallies, schemes and fervent preaching, the Lord looks for un-distracted faith from those who profess His name. He is creating a church ready for His coming again which will happen at any time, if we will believe it and be ready.

The Lord God is pursuing His purposes relentlessly and He will not be deviated. Let us take care lest our own schemes and endeavours reflect the disciples at their non-understanding worst, and not their unreservedly faithful best.

God bless you

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