

Sermon – 17/08/2008 pm

Carry On

Study Text: Revelation 22:11-12

‘He who has an ear let him hear’. This is the solemn refrain that comes at the end of each of the seven letters to the seven churches. It is a refrain that Jesus often used at the end of his parables (Luke 8:8). He explained it with words from the prophet Isaiah *seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand*. Some understood to the message of the parable but others simply enjoyed the story. They came to hear a fine preacher or be part of the crowd.

A time of tribulation worked to shake out those who did not understand; those who had head knowledge but no heart knowledge of Jesus. The church on earth is made up of wheat and weeds/tares. Let them grow together until harvest said Jesus. At harvest time the weeds would be gathered and burned in the fire and the wheat gathered into ‘my barn’.

Be Unjust and Filthy

What do you think became of the rich man’s brothers? From torment in hell, the rich man pleaded for Lazarus to be sent from heaven to tell the man’s five brothers about heaven and hell. They were on their way to hell and he wanted to warn them of the reality of hell. Do you remember what the rich man was told? ‘They have Moses and the prophets, let your brothers hear them’ (Luke 16:29). The rich man had Moses and the prophets himself but he did not care to hear what they said. He was too busy making money and living a comfortable life. Did his brothers follow in the footsteps of this popular and successful individual?

The words of the angel ‘let the unjust continue to be unjust and the filthy continue to be filthy’ (22:10) are very disturbing, and indeed theologically difficult. There seems to be inevitability about their future and no chance of repentance. We know that repentance is possible whenever we are alive in this world, but there is also the matter of hardening of the heart.

We hear a lot these days about hardening of the arteries but little about hardening of the heart. Cholesterol from fatty foods is deposited around the arteries until they are completely cut off and we die from an aneurism. We are warned about eating fatty foods which cause this deposit. Most people heed this warning and adjust their diet accordingly. Millions of food/diet/health magazines carrying such a warning are bought and carefully read. But how many read and believe the warnings about spiritual ‘heart’ disease written in God’s book, the Bible.

One thief on the cross beside Jesus believed and was saved the day he died. What about the other one? He ridiculed Jesus as he hung on a cross on the other side. He watched Jesus die beside him but still he did not repent of his sin and receive salvation. This is a picture of humanity. The cross of Jesus is there for all to see. Some will believe and enter paradise while others blaspheme his name to the very end.

The verse before us speaks of people continuing in their wicked ways in spite of the words of Jesus *Behold I am coming quickly*. It speaks of free will with people hearing but not obeying.

But it speaks even more of divine determination. The terrible truth about hardening of the heart is reflected in this verse.

Pharaoh kept on rejecting the word of God which Moses spoke to him. Ten times he heard the call of the Almighty to let the people go and worship the Lord. After this he was destroyed. Pharaoh's heart became hard and he refused to change his ways. Scripture tells us that God hardened his heart. The sovereign God *has mercy on who he will and whom he wills he hardens* (Romans 9:18).

Who are the ones who will enter heaven and inherit their reward? Those whose names are written in the Book of Life. How did their names get into this book? By the sovereign grace of God. By divine determination; indeed predestination. By the same divine determination some are given up to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts (Romans 1:24). Some will go on in their filthy ways until the end.

Many shall be purified, made white and refined but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand but the wiseshall understand (Daniel12:10). This is what the Lord told Daniel regarding the time of the end. The message given to John was much the same, except that it comes as an imperative – let it be so. Hendrikson calls it the 'let of withdrawal and let of exhortation'.

There is no indication here of any widespread turning to the Lord as the end approaches, and certainly no indication of universal salvation. Rather people will keep on living in the same way that always have, just as in the days of Noah. Despite the words of Jesus *Behold I am coming quickly*, many will continue in their unjust/unrighteous ways and morally filthy ways.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life enslaves many today. They cling to this world with all their might. Their only desire is for more and more of what this world offers. Even after death they want the world to remember them, for they see nothing beyond this world. But remember *this world is passing away and the lusts of it; but he who does the will of God lives forever* (I John 2:17).

Be Righteous, Be Holy

What a contrast. Two ways of living are portrayed here – just two. The way of holiness and purity is the very antithesis of the way of filth. There is no middle way. 'But what about those who live good lives yet never come to church' you say? 'Look at the rich man in hell' I reply. He never thought of himself as unjust or filthy but the truth is he went to hell. Beware of those who say they are not fundamentalists or that they don't want too much religion.

You are either for Christ or against him. You either have the Holy Spirit or you don't. Remember the luke-warm members of the church at Laodicea. They were self-assured and had need of nothing from God. They had no need of prayer or to study their Bible. And then there was the church at Ephesus which had lost its first love. They were urged to repent, to return to Christ and obey his words. 'Be holy as I am holy' says the Lord.

These words need to be heard by all in the church today. How much of what goes on in the church today is the work of men, not the work of God? Where is the fear of God, where is obedience to Christ and his word? The wise virgins had plenty of oil for their lamps. They

were ready for Jesus to come at any time. Jesus is coming at an hour you do not expect (Mat 24:44). Will he find you walking in righteousness and holiness?

Behold I Am Coming Quickly

John continues to encourage with the words of Jesus *Behold I am coming quickly*. We heard these a few verses back and we will hear them again in this closing chapter of the Bible. Last time these words were associated with a blessing. This time they are associated with a reward. *My reward is with me to give to everyone according to his work (22:12)*.

What is this reward Jesus has? What are the works he is rewarding? Does this verse mean that a person will be saved and get to heaven on the basis of good works? Certainly not! Salvation is the gift of God not the reward of works (Ephesians 2:8). Jesus was asked *what shall we do that we may work the works of God*. His answer was *this is the work of God that you believe in him whom he sent (John 6:29)*. The work referred to in this verse is the same work, the work of belief.

The context here is the time of the end and the focus is upon keeping the faith in the face of opposition until the end. *Hold fast what you have till I come (1:25)*. Patience and endurance will be rewarded in the end (13:10, 14:12).

What is the reward of Jesus? Again the focus is on salvation. He will grant to those who remain faithful to overcome the world, to sit with him on his throne and to reign with him. That is a very great reward, a reward worth keeping in mind as you press on through life in this world.

Paul looked to the crown of righteousness as his heavenly reward (II Timothy 4:8). Did he see a similar vision to John with the twenty-four elders around the throne, clothed in white robes with golden crowns on their heads (4:4)? Jesus promised those who overcame to sit with him on his throne; presumably they were given their crown at this time. He promised that they would sit at his table in the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9).

What greater reward could you expect? Can you think of any greater reward on earth or in heaven than to be with your Lord and Saviour on his throne? Do you ever stop to contemplate the reward of Jesus Christ? Do stop and consider Jesus, his great salvation and his great reward to you who keep the faith and are obedient to the end.

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