

On The Wall

Matthew 25; Revelation 19; 1 Thessalonians NIV

If you have a Bible with you or use one provided in the back of the pew, turn to Revelation 19 and be ready to follow along a little later in the message.

This morning I want to look at a couple of passages concerning a time when large groups of peoples are gathered and two powerful forces face off. These events have been called by different names through the years, like: the final judgment; the last great battle; the white throne judgment; Armageddon.

These two events that will take place some time in the future are mentioned in Matthew 25 and Revelation 19. Currently, in our morning study, we are in 1 Thessalonians. Paul makes reference to these future events to the new church in that city, using these events to assure and encourage these new believers that their faith and sacrifice is not a waste of time.

Reference to these events also serve as a warning. Know where you are going.

I remember an illustration about two groups of people divided by a wall. And on this wall sat an individual who claimed not to belong to either group. From his location on this wall, he watched each group go about their daily routine, judging that there were good and bad people in both groups.

One day, the Lord returned for his group, and Satan gathered all that was left of the two groups. As the individual sat on the wall contemplating what had just happened, Satan returned and appeared to be looking for something.

Shouting from above he asked Satan, "What are you looking for?"

Looking up, Satan replied, "Oh. There you are."

Surprised that he was the object of the search, he asked, "Why were you looking for me? I didn't choose sides."

"Because I own the wall," Satan explained.

The point of the illustration is that there is no middle ground. There is no place to go and not choose sides. You are either for the Lord or against him. You are either for Satan or against him. This is a true two party system- no independents. There is no third choice. There are only two places to spend eternity. It's either Heaven or Hell. You do get to choose.

In Matthew 25, Jesus uses some illustrations to help his listeners understand what the kingdom of Heaven would be like.

In his first illustration, He uses five foolish and five wise virgins. (25:1-13) Notice two groups. One group made it in, the other left out.

In his second illustration, he uses three servants who are entrusted with sums of their master's money to invest while the master is away. When he returned and examined the three, two were invited to share in the master's happiness, while the third was thrown out, "...where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (25:30) Notice only two locations mentioned, either in or out.

The third illustration begins in verse 31. Nations are gathered before Him as the Son of Man sits on His throne. The peoples are separated into two groups represented as sheep and goats. Their actions are examined and classified. They either did or did not do for Jesus, based on, "...what ever you did (or did not do) for the least of these brothers of mine, you did (or did not do) for me." (25:40, 45) Verse 46 then concludes, "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Two groups, two sets of actions, and two locations...

Some think that this third illustration has to do with how people treat the 144,000 Jewish witnesses that will evangelize during the tribulation period. That could be. But

even if it does pertain to that particular time, that doesn't exempt everyone else from their actions. There are plenty of other passages that make it clear that you are responsible to choose sides, how you go about choosing sides, and how you are to live after you choose sides.

You don't have to assume or guess about your standing in the Lord or your progress toward a lifestyle that is pleasing to Him. You can know how you are doing without guessing or assuming. Assuming and guessing will only get you in trouble.

After several years of planning and saving, the time finally arrived for a husband and wife to purchase tickets, make reservations, and set the date for their trip to Australia. A few days into their stay, the couple headed into the outback to get some of their own pictures. From what they saw in brochures and on the Internet, they could hardly wait to see this beautiful country with their own eyes—and through a camera lens.

The couple enjoyed a leisurely ride while snapping picture after picture when suddenly a kangaroo bounded from the bush and slammed into the side of the vehicle. Once stopped, the husband jumped out of the vehicle and began examining the motionless body of the animal.

"I think it's dead," he said to his wife.

Not thinking too clearly at the moment, the husband returned to the vehicle, grabbed his jacket, slipped it around the assumed

dead kangaroo, raised the animal to pose with him, and said, "Quick! Get our picture."

Before his wife could ready the camera for the shot of a lifetime, the assumed dead kangaroo sprang to life and returned to the bush wearing the husband's jacket. In the pockets of the jacket were hotel room keys, the vehicle lease agreement, and a wallet full of credit cards.

For this couple, assuming was a minor inconvenience on a vacation compared to assuming your eternal destination. Don't assume or guess about eternity.

Reminding the young Thessalonian church about their destination was so important to Paul that he mentions it from beginning to end in his first letter to them. At the end of chapter one, he writes, "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath." (1 Thess 1:9-10)

Chapter 2: "19For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy." (1 Thess 2:19-20)

Chapter 3: "13May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." (1 Thess 3:13)

Chapter 4: "15According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words." (1 Thess 4:15-18)

Chapter 5: "19Do not put out the Spirit's fire;²⁰ do not treat prophecies with contempt.²¹ Test everything. Hold on to the good.²² Avoid every kind of evil.

²³May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

²⁵Brothers, pray for us.²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.²⁷ I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (1 Thess 5:19-28)

Did you notice how important this was to Paul that they not miss the coming of the Lord and their final destination? ²⁷I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

Paul wanted them to know that their faithfulness was not a waste of time. He

wanted them to choose the right destination. Make no assumptions. Know where you are going.

Did you know that there are two great feasts planned for a great future gathering? Look at Revelation 19 with me. ----

Notice that in the first part of the chapter that there is a lot of shouting and praising going on. Understandable for what is about to happen: the avenging of the saints blood and the union of the bride and groom is about to take place.

Begin at verse 9 with me: “⁹Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

¹⁰At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

¹¹I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will

rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

¹⁷And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”

¹⁹Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”

Two feasts prepared: apparently one in Heaven and one on the Earth. Is there any doubt in your mind, which one is going to be the one, you want to attend? How about your family and friends? Where do you want them to be?

If my understanding is correct, the Lord could return at any time. If that is true, and the tribulation period is seven years long, if

the Lord would return today, then these events in Revelation 19 could only be seven years in the future. That’s not very long, is it?

Hell is not the favorite subject of this preacher. I heard it said recently that Jesus spoke more about Hell than he did Heaven. If this is true, then we had better pay attention. The good part, if we can say that there is a good part about Hell, is that it should spark our compassion for those who could end up there.

The thought of a family member, a friend or neighbor; looking in the face of those people who scan your items at Lowe’s, Target, or the supermarket. Take a good look the next time and try to imagine that face in the torment of the lake of fire. Then say something to them about Jesus. The Spirit will be right there with you helping you form the words.

As we watch and plan for his return, remember that we are to encourage one another with the assurance of his coming. Remember the Lord’s Supper and don’t neglect the coming together.

Don’t get caught on the wall. Don’t assume or guess that you are ok or that your loved ones are ok. Talk to them. Ask hard questions. Wouldn’t you rather take the chance that they become mad at you now than to end up at the wrong feast?

For those you meet on a daily basis, have compassion. Speak to them about the Lord.

It's one thing to be invited to a feast, but quite another to be the feast.

I want to close with these words of encouragement: “¹³May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” (1 Thess 3:13)

²³May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (5:23-24)