

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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SOME STANDING HERE SHALL NOT TASTE DEATH

Matthew 16:27-28

The hopes of the disciples about the Messianic reign were crushed when Jesus told them plainly that He was to die. They were not prepared for such a shocking revelation.

As an encouragement, the Lord Jesus assured them that though His death was near, yet the time will come when His kingdom will be established with great power. Let's read this passage, Matthew 16:27-28.

Matthew 16:27. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.

28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

I would like you to notice the first word of v. 28, 'Truly'. *Truly I say to you*. The word in Greek is *amen*. Amen I say to you. Whenever the Lord introduces a statement with 'truly' or 'amen', we know that He is about to say something of great importance. And here, He is saying that some people who are listening to Him will not taste death until they see Him coming in His kingdom.

Witnessing the coming of the kingdom

Several people reading this passage have assumed that Jesus was promising that some of those hearing His words at that time would still be alive to see Him coming back to inaugurate His kingdom on earth. It is quite possible that the disciples themselves thought that they would be able to witness Jesus' return. But the disciples have died, and Jesus did not come back yet. Therefore this passage must be understood differently.

Perhaps v. 28 deals with the appearance of the kingdom, and not with Jesus' second coming. If we look for an event within the lifetime of at least some who were present which could correspond to the coming of the kingdom, the following options have been suggested:

(1) Since in all three synoptic gospels this statement is followed by the transfiguration of Jesus, it has been argued that this is what was intended. But an event that was to happen in only six days is hardly compatible with the statement that some would live to see it.

(2) Others take this to refer to the resurrection or to Pentecost. Again the time interval (probably less than a year) seems too short to warrant the phrasing 'some standing here who will not taste death.'

(3) Still others interpret this verse as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The problem is that the context does not encourage this interpretation. The preceding verse, v. 27, clearly refers to Jesus' final coming for judgment. The transition from Jesus' second coming to the fall of Jerusalem seems too sudden.

When we study a passage like Matthew 16:28, it is important to keep in mind that the teaching of Jesus is spiritual in character. 'My words,' the Lord said in John 6, 'they are spirit and they are life.' In other words, we have to understand them spiritually. This is not to be confused with understanding them literally. There is a difference. Sometimes a literal understanding of Jesus' words is not appropriate. When Jesus said in John 2, 'This temple, if you destroy it, I will raise it in three days,' the Jews understood Him as speaking of the temple at Jerusalem. They were thinking literally. But Jesus was speaking spiritually. He was talking about the spiritual temple of His body (John 2:21).

Until you see it

One of the main problems in understanding this passage is the interpretation of the word 'until'. ... *There are some of those ... who shall not taste death **until** they see...* We tend to assume with this kind of phrase that there is a termination of the action or state of the first clause when the time of the 'until' clause has passed. If that is the case, it would mean that you will first see the Son of man coming in His kingdom, and after that, you will taste death. You will die. Some of you standing here will be alive until the coming of Jesus and His kingdom. And then, when you have seen that, you will then die.

Here it is important to know that in Greek the word 'until' does not require the conclusion that people will die after seeing the coming of the Son of Man and His kingdom. If you look at the use of this word 'until' in the Scriptures, *heos an*, you will see that it does not necessarily mean that there is a termination of a state after the 'until'.

Let's take this example. Matthew 22:44. This is taken from Psalm 110:1, which is quoted so many times in the NT.

*Matthew 22:44. The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, **until** (heos an) I put your enemies under your feet."*

Notice the word 'until'. In Greek, it is the same word found in Matthew 16:28. What does 'until' mean here? Is the Lord saying, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies subjected to you. And then, after that, you will not be at my right hand anymore'? Such an interpretation of the verse is obviously wrong. The whole point is that Christ will constantly be in a position of glory. Christ will always be the name that is above every name, even after His enemies are put under His feet. So here the word 'until' does not indicate the end of something. It does not mark a change of position.

Here is another verse using *heos an*. In 1Corinthians 4:5, Paul says this.

*1Corinthians 4:5. Therefore judge nothing before the time, **until** (heos an) the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*

'Do not pronounce judgment until the Lord comes.' Does the word 'until' mean that you don't pronounce judgment now, but when the Lord comes, you can start pronouncing judgment? Of course not. It means that when the Lord comes, it is He who will pronounce judgment. We will never pronounce judgment. The word 'until' implies that we will never do it. So far from indicating the end of something, it actually stresses the continuance of something.

Therefore when the Lord Jesus says, *There are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*, we should not automatically assume that those standing there will necessarily die after they have seen Jesus and His kingdom.

Seeing the kingdom of God

This being said, I think that we tend to put too much emphasis on this question of ‘not tasting death.’ And as a consequence, we do not pay enough attention to the latter part of the sentence which has to do with ‘seeing the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.’ You shall not die until you see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. Of key importance in deciding the interpretation of this verse is the necessity of giving full heed to the statement about seeing Jesus coming in His kingdom. So what does that mean, to see the Lord Jesus coming in His kingdom?

When you look at the parallel passages in Mark and in Luke, you will notice that the wording is slightly different. They both speak about seeing the kingdom of God.

*Mark 9:1. And He was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until **they see the kingdom of God** after it has come with power."*

*Luke 9:27. "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until **they see the kingdom of God**."*

*Matthew 16:28. "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until **they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom**."*

Compare that to Matthew 16:28. ‘Seeing the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom’ means, therefore, the same as ‘seeing the kingdom of God.’ Mark specifically mentions that it will be seen coming with power.

But what is the kingdom, that you may see it? We have to understand that the kingdom of God is not something physical that you can observe in some external manner. You cannot see it in the same way as you see the stars, the sun or the moon. That’s what Jesus told the Pharisees who wanted to know when the kingdom of God would come. He said to them, *The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst* (Luke 17:20-21).

‘The kingdom of God is among you. It is right in front of you. But you do not see it.’ Why? Because it is spiritual.

The necessity of regeneration

How then do you see the kingdom? Let us turn to John 3:3 for a moment. Jesus made this solemn statement to Nicodemus.

*John 3:3. Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly (amen, amen, the same expression of strong affirmation), I say to you, unless one is born again (now notice those words), **he cannot see the kingdom of God**."*

It is very important to grasp the spiritual content of this verse. The point is that you will not be able to see the kingdom of God if you had not been born again. Only those who have been regenerated will be able to see the kingdom. That makes Matthew 16:28 somewhat more understandable. Some

people in the crowd Jesus was speaking to will experience regeneration and because of that, they will see the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is therefore invisible to the unbeliever. Why is it that you must be born again to see the kingdom? Because only the regenerate person is open to God's revelation. The Lord Jesus made this point to the disciples in Luke 10. These are His words in Luke 10:23-24.

*Luke 10:23. And turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see,
24 for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them. "*

‘Blessed are your eyes that you can see the things which kings and prophets longed to see but have never been able. And blessed are your ears that you could hear the things that you hear. Kings and prophets have longed to hear these things but they couldn’t hear it.’

Why is that so? Let’s read back to v. 21.

*Luke 10:21. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and **revealed** them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight."*

The Lord Jesus is saying, ‘The spiritual things of God cannot be seen or heard, they cannot be understood or perceived unless God reveals them to you. If you don’t see it, it is not because you lack intelligence. It is not because you lack education. It is simply because God hasn’t revealed it to you. God has hidden these things from the wise, the intelligent, and revealed them to babes, those people who are willing to become as children, depending upon their heavenly Father.’ Therefore, unless you yield your life totally to God (and God is then able to regenerate you), you cannot see the kingdom.

You will never see death

Now, to see the kingdom is to see life. Kingdom and life are parallel in the Lord’s teaching. In John 3:3, we saw that Jesus said to Nicodemus, ‘You cannot see the kingdom.’ A few verses later, in John 3:36, He will say, ‘You will not see life.’ Let’s put these 2 verses side by side so that we can see the parallel more clearly.

John 3:3. Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

*John 3:36. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son **shall not see life**, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

Here in v. 36, we see that to believe means to obey (*He who believes ... he who does not obey...*). And to see life is to experience eternal life. Life here is God’s life. It is the kingdom of God. Those who do not believe or do not obey will not see life. They will not see the kingdom. Those who believe and live in obedience to the Son of God are able to see the kingdom of heaven. They have eternal life, which means that they will never see death. They will never die. Listen to John 8:51.

*John 8:51. "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will **never see death**."*

‘If anyone keeps (i.e. obeys) My word, he will never see death.’ ‘There will be some of you standing here who will not see death because you will have eternal life.’ You see, the meaning of Matthew 16:28 is not that you will see death after you see the kingdom. The whole point is that you

will never see death. It is like Matthew 22:44. Christ will never cease to be in a position of glory, at the right hand of the Father. Or 1Corinthians 4:5. We will never pronounce judgment.

Observe now the next verse. John 8:52.

*John 8:52. The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, as did the prophets; and you say, 'If any one keeps my word, he will **never taste death.**'"*

The Jews were quoting Jesus. 'You said, 'He will never taste death.''' Jesus actually said, 'He will never see death.' To see and to taste in this passage mean exactly the same thing. It is to experience something. We can apply this insight to Matthew 16:28. Some of you who are standing here will not taste death until you see the kingdom. If you turn around the words 'taste' and 'see', the meaning of the sentence does not change. It remains exactly the same because these words are synonymous. Some of you who are standing here will not see death until you taste the kingdom.

Why is this so? That is, why will we not taste death? Because the Lord Jesus said, 'I will taste death for you. I will die in your place.' These are the words of Hebrews 2:9 where we find exactly the same expression, 'taste death', as in Matthew 16:28.

*Hebrews 2:9. But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God **He might taste death for everyone.***

By His death on the cross, Christ made it possible for us to live eternally with God.

Now the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:28 are clear. There are some of you who will not taste death. Why? Because they will have eternal life. The words 'not taste death' have to do with eternal life. They have to do with those who are regenerate, those who have God's life. These are the people who will be able to see the kingdom of God.