

# Meeting With Christ

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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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## FILL UP THEN THE MEASURE OF YOUR FATHERS

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### Matthew 23:32

We have studied many of Jesus' words and now we are approaching His teaching concerning the last days, the end time. In Matthew 24:3, the disciples asked Jesus, *Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of **the end of the age**?* In theology, the subject of 'the end of the age' is called 'eschatology.' Eschatology is from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means 'last.' So eschatology is the teaching concerning the last things, the things which will come as this age draws to a close.

Notice that we are not talking about the end of the world. The end of the world, if we speak of it in absolute terms, is mentioned in Revelation where we are told about a 'new heaven and a new earth.' It is also seen in 2Peter where Peter writes that 'this world will be destroyed with intense heat.'

Here in v. 23, we are dealing with the 'end of the age,' the age of the NT period. The OT age has already passed. The NT age is now coming to an end, and this will happen with the return of the Lord Jesus. The first time, Jesus came in humility, without revealing His identity. He was, you can say, the 'King incognito.' But in His second coming, His identity will be made very plain. Jesus will return, not as the 'King incognito,' but as the reigning King, as the 'manifest King.'

So there is an end to this NT age and we are approaching it. Now when we talk about an end, immediately we have some questions. Why should there be an end at all, you might want to ask? Should not God just let mankind carry on? Why does God intervene?

### The measure of wickedness

In order to discuss this point, we must look at what is called 'the measure of wickedness' - the measure of evil in the world. This teaching explains the principle by which God deals with mankind, with you and I.

Let's read Matthew 23:32 to see how Jesus talks about this measure.

*Matthew 23:32. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!*

Unless we know the scriptural teaching on the measure of wickedness, Jesus' words here will be difficult to understand. The two key words are 'fill' and 'measure.' When the measure is filled up, then something happens. The measure of what? The measure of sin, of wickedness. And what happens when it is filled up? God puts an end to it. In other words, God will not allow wickedness to go

beyond a certain point. Up to that point, He will tolerate it. Beyond that point, His holiness and His love cannot endure wickedness any further. So He stops it.

This is what happened in Genesis 6:11-13, when the earth was filled with violence. When the measure of wickedness was reached, God sent the flood and destroyed almost all the people on the earth.

*Genesis 6:11. Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.*

*13 Then God said to Noah, **The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.***

This world is God's world. We are His creatures. Whether we acknowledge it or not does not change the fact that He will not allow wickedness to go beyond a certain level. And when evil reaches that point, His judgment will come.

When Jesus told the Pharisees, 'Fill up the measure of your fathers,' He was saying, 'Your wickedness is now reaching up. You are filling the measure of evil of your fathers. When the measure is full, judgment will begin.'

## **Reaching the full measure of sin**

We find the same principle in Genesis 15:16.

*Genesis 15:16. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for **the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.***

God said, 'When the measure of wickedness of the Amorites is complete, then the Amorites will be destroyed. But until that measure is complete, I will wait and bear with them.' In Genesis 15, the Amorites were not yet destroyed. God granted them four hundred years for repentance. At the time of Joshua, God could not wait any longer. His patience has reached its limit. So Joshua was given the order to wipe out the Amorites. God is a God of holiness. He cannot tolerate sin indefinitely.

Paul writes in Romans 2:4-5 that those who indulge themselves in sin, while the kindness and patience of God invite them to repentance, 'are storing up wrath.'

*Romans 2:4. Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*

*5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are **storing up wrath** for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

Here 'storing up wrath' has the same meaning as 'filling up the measure.' There is a day of wrath when the judgment of God will be revealed. It will take place after the impenitent people have filled up the measure of their iniquity.

This word 'fill,' filling up the measure with sin, is a key word. It appears in many places in the OT. Here are a few examples.

*Jeremiah 16:18. And first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin, because they have defiled My land; they have **filled** My inheritance with the **carcasses** of their detestable and abominable idols.*

*Jeremiah 19:4. Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and because they have **filled** this place with the **blood** of the innocents.*

*Jeremiah 51:5. For Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah, by his God, the Lord of hosts, though their land was **filled** with **sin** against the Holy One of Israel.*

*Ezekiel 8:17. ... For they have **filled** the land with **violence**; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose.*

*Ezekiel 28:16. By the abundance of your trading you became **filled** with **violence** within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you...*

In all these verses, we find the idea of a measure of sin, of rebellion against God, which fills gradually. Imagine a pitcher that you fill with water, drop by drop. God keeps track of all men's sins. He observes the number and the measure of men's sins. He determines within Himself how long He will bear with sinful men or nations. He is very patient, but His patience has a limit. When His patience reaches its limit, when the measure of men's sins is full, then God takes action, i.e. destruction inevitably comes.

## **The patience of God**

The same principle appears in several passages of the NT. For example, it is applied to Jewish persecution of Christians in 1Thessalonians 2:14-16.

*1Thessalonians 2:14. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,*

*15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,*

*16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always **fill up the measure of their sins**. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.*

Because of their continual rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and the persecution of His followers, the Jews displeased God. They 'filled up the measure of their sins.' They piled sin upon sin until their sin became full. Then God's *wrath has come upon them to the utmost*. The verb 'has come' is in the aorist tense, which usually denotes action in the past. But here the wrath is clearly eschatological and therefore future. This sentence leaves no hope for the future. The idea is that they sinned so much that they reached the point of no return. A person or a nation can reach a point in opposition to God where returning to God is impossible.

The concept of a measure of wickedness also explains why the punishment of the wicked is often delayed. Their iniquities, so to speak, are not yet 'ripe.' The wicked continue to live, become old, and enjoy many things. Until the measure is filled, God remains patient. And sometimes, we are astonished at His patience, at the fact that He can tolerate so much for so long.

In 1Peter 3:20, we read that God waited patiently in the days of Noah. He saw wickedness multiplying among men but He did not wipe them out. He waited for the measure to fill up. He gave them a chance to repent. But finally, when that measure was reached, the flood came.

*1Peter 3:20. ... who once were disobedient, when **the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah**, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.*

The same principle appears in Matthew 24:6.

*Matthew 24:6: And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, **but the end is not yet.***

Not yet. Not yet by that time. There will be wars and rumors of war. Everything will intensify. The end is not yet. Why? Because wickedness will still be allowed to multiply more.

You see, the reason why things are moving on towards an end is because God cannot tolerate an unlimited measure of sin. When evil reaches a certain point, His judgement will come swiftly. But until then, God remains patient and compassionate.

Why is God so patient? God can wait for a long time. And when He waits, He is giving every man an opportunity to repent so that nobody on the judgment day will be able to say, 'I didn't get a chance.' If God reacted instantly the moment we do something evil, we would not exist for very long. God is patient. He gives the world time to repent.

In v. 38 of Matthew 23, we have this sentence: *Behold, your house is being left to you **desolate!*** The word 'desolate' in Greek, *eremos*, is the same word as for 'desert.' Their house was to be deserted by God. This is a word that you will find repeated again and again by Jeremiah in the Septuagint. Jeremiah was constantly warning Israel, 'You will be turned into a desolation because of your disobedience to the Lord. God is going to wipe you out.' Desolation came when the Babylonian army marched against Jerusalem. Jesus used the same expression in Matthew 23. 'The desolation that your fathers experienced, you will experience also as you fill up the measure of your fathers. The same thing is going to happen to you. Do you understand?' Well, they did not understand. Jesus said in v. 37, *How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were **unwilling.*** Therefore, your house will be left desolate.'

## Seeing God again

In these closing words of Matthew 23, the Lord Jesus gives us a framework of His teaching on the last things. There are four things that we have to mention. You will notice that these four things together point to the fact that the Jewish nation is a sort of spiritual barometer through which we can see our proximity to the end of things. We can see how close the measure of wickedness is being filled up.

So the first thing is this. Jesus predicts that He will be rejected by the Jewish nation. That is still true today.

The second thing He says is that as a result of this, the Jews will be forsaken by God for a certain period of time. This period of time is called in Luke 21 'the times of the Gentiles.'

Thirdly, during this time of broken relationship, the Jews will not see God. Matthew 23:39: *For I say to you, from now on **you shall not see Me**...* This means that when they see Him again, the time of being forsaken will be over.

And fourthly, there will be a time when they will turn back to God. They will repent. There will be a change of heart. We see that in v. 39 also. *For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until (until you see Me again. When will they see Him again? Until ...) you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'*

*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!* These words come from Psalm 118:26. Observe the resemblance.

*Psalm 118:26. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord; We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.*

What does it mean that the Jews will not see God until they say, *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*? Why does Jesus quote this passage?

Psalm 118 is part of what is known as the 'Hallel Psalms,' a name given to Psalms 113-118. The word 'hallel' comes from 'hallelujah,' which means 'praise be to God.' So the Hallel Psalms are psalms of praise to God, and Psalm 118 is the last part of the praise.

The Hallel is recited on major biblical events, especially at the Passover, during the killing of the Passover lamb. Why? Because it was the blood of the Passover lamb that delivered the people of Israel from Egypt. On that day, the spirit of the Lord destroyed all the first-born in Egypt but passed over the homes marked with the blood of a slaughtered lamb. This tragedy prompted the Pharaoh to release the Israelite slaves. And the Hallel was sung by the Jews to praise God for this miraculous deliverance.

When we put this back into Matthew 23, Jesus is saying, 'You will not see Me again until you recite the words of the Hallel which you sing when the Passover is being sacrificed, until you recognize, as Paul says, that 'Christ is the Passover' (1Corinthians 5:7). Christ is the redemption for our sins. His blood covers us. It cleanses us from sin. It protects us from death. 'You will not see Me again until you recognize that I died for your sins and until you sing these messianic words.'

Notice that the expression 'He who comes' in the phrase 'Blessed is He who comes' is in fact a title of the Messiah. He is the coming One. He will come again. In several places of the NT, the Messiah is referred to as 'the one who comes' (Matthew 3:11; 21:9; John 11:27).

So the point of all this is clear. Jesus is telling the Jews, 'You will not see Me again until you recognize Me as your Messiah, as your Savior.' And this is what Paul is talking about in Romans 11:26 where he declared that all of Israel will be saved (*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written...*). At that point, there will be a change of heart as Ezekiel wrote in Ezekiel 36:26: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* This is the day when the Jews will welcome Jesus and say, *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*' This is the day when the Jews will accept Christ as their King.