



THE NEW SHOFAR

We forget about Hell to our peril.

Are our daily deeds acts of the worship of God?

November 22nd

As for you, my flock, thus says Yahweh: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats – Ezekiel 34

For those who would like to deny the whole concept of a judgment at the End, this reading from Ezekiel must pose a difficulty. But he is not alone. He is joined by St Paul...*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10.* And of course, there are the words of Jesus himself...*But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned... Matthew 12:36-37.* It would be accurate to say that few truths are as clearly proclaimed in the Bible as the truth of the final judgment.

As European thinkers began to move away from internal religious arguments – Catholics versus Protestants, they moved into a deeper issue – the validity of belief in a Divine Being. What they were seeking was a God who was gentler, one more attuned to the social, financial, scientific and political advancements of the time. They proposed a new morality, one in which there was no place for hell, a society where science replaced belief in miracles. The Bible was looked on as a being a culturally limited man made document, one in which the God of Genesis appeared as a vengeful deity. Voltaire said it clearly...*If all men were philosophers, lovers and practitioners of wisdom, religion would be unnecessary, and societies would live by a natural ethic independent of theology.* This is still the thinking of the world in which we strive to live the Gospel. But it is not the Truth as revealed to us by God.

All will need to account for who they have been, what they have done

Christians believe that in the presence of Christ our relationship to God will be laid bare. Everything will be revealed, the good that the person has done or has failed to do, along with our sins and failings. It is not primarily a search for sin. It is an encounter in which God (as portrayed by father in the parable of the prodigal son), in His Son Jesus the Christ (who died for our sins), and seeks to understand reasons for welcoming men and women into eternal life. St Augustine portrays the scene when He says to the wicked, *You have placed nothing in the hands of the poor; therefore you have found nothing in my presence.*

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Fortunately for our sake, the judgment as to who are *sheep* and who are *goats* will be based on divine love and mercy and not on the way we might want to assess someone else.

We know from the Book of Revelation, that the extended time between Easter Sunday and the End of creation comes about because God seeks the salvation of all men and women. This “delay” is a divine gift to provide opportunities for everyone to convert, to repent and to turn back to God in faithfulness. Knowing the truth and the reality of the Final Judgment is all about God desiring our salvation, God wanting us to inherit Life eternal.

Is the End nigh? Yes it is!

From a biblical perspective, we are already living in the end times. These are the times given to us by God for the spread of the Good News to the ends of the earth. We are already living in the final age, the time when the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way. Our challenge as *sheep* is to enlighten the world with the *Light* of Christ, flavour it with the *salt* of the Kingdom. This is our task, one we undertake with our every word and action in the communities around us. The practical details of this are spelled out for us in today’s Gospel reading. We need to be *doing the Gospel* in every aspect of our lives.

God is merciful and loving but that does not mean anything and everything is acceptable in the eyes of our loving and merciful Father. This is partly why the call to **REPENT** is so prevalent throughout the Scriptures. Paul warns us not to be ignorant as were the Jews in their rejection of Jesus (**Romans 11:25-26**). It is all too easy to create an image of the Kingdom of God and of God Himself that is more a reflection of our own wishes and expectations than it is of what God has revealed. This spiritual and religious hubris is a part of the sin from which we have been delivered in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is so easy to be seduced by false prophets in these end times

Across most of the New Testament texts, along with the writings of the Fathers, there is an understanding that in these *final times* there is a significant to our eternal life. The most challenging is that of *apostasy*, not a word spoken of much outside of theology books. Paul wrote of how in the final days leading up to the End, opposition to God will increase and there will be many “good” and “rational” reasons for giving up on God. Many believers will simply drift away from Christ as believing becomes too difficult or because they think the cost of faithfulness is too high. They will be *seduced* by the thinking of the times and prefer the more self-centred “religions” of culture preferable to the self-sacrificial living for others that is fundamental to the Gospel. This is why Jesus wondered with his disciples *when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on earth?* (Luke 18:8).

In the End it is all about God

The final judgment is about God, a highlighting of the justice and mercy of God. All creation belongs to God and gives glory to God. When it comes to that Last Day the things for which we face judgment will be based on whether or not our lives give God glory. Has our life on earth been an ongoing work of glorifying God? If we are used to undertaking a daily assessment of our lives, we can easily answer this. We will also know that what glorifies God most of all is the love we have for Him and for His creatures.

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