Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 12-01-2013



In the lesson today, we will study the importance of being prepared and the dangers of not doing this in spite of having adequate warnings. We will look at an illustration from history as well as the Old Testament Books of Genesis and Isaiah. Finally, we will turn to the Gospel of Matthew and conclude with teaching about the End Times from what is known as the Olivet Discourse.

On June 25, 1876, the Indian scout named Goes-Ahead warned General George Custer not to attack the Indian encampment at Little Bighorn, South Dakota. Goes-Ahead was so certain about the negative outcome that he removed his US Army uniform and changed into traditional Native American Indian clothing, which was supposed to ease the entry of his soul to the afterlife. Custer considered these actions as "defeatist" and was so angry at this and the other scout's behavior that the General dismissed them on the spot, an action which saved the Indian's lives. Custer continued with the attack that in retrospect had very predictable results. Not a single Army soldier in Custer's brigade survived the attack and as a result, little was known about what actually happened during the battle. It wasn't until General Terry arrived two days later on June 27 that anyone even knew that the brigade had perished. "Custer's Last Stand," as it came to be known, was a disaster for Custer and his men because he was ill-prepared for the battle. The well-skilled and qualified General was alert, yet he ultimately wasn't equipped with the resources necessary to win the battle. Even though he was forewarned, he wasn't prepared enough to win the Battle, though those after him learned from his mistakes and went on to be victorious.

What can we learn about General Custer's Last Stand? Although this military leader was forewarned, he and his troops were not well enough prepared to win the battle. Likewise, people are warned about the return of the Lord and the coming tribulation for those who haven't trusted in Him through faith, yet many still persist in their sin and unbelief. The Bible is full of admonition for people to believe while they still have the chance. The Prophet Isaiah said, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near." In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, God instructed Noah to build an ark to save his family from the coming global flood (Genesis 6:13). Although the people didn't have the Bible, Noah, who was called a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), warned the people about their coming destruction. In spite of the fact that they were cautioned for 120 years (Genesis 6:3) the entire world perished except for Noah and his family (7:21-22). Though only Noah's family believed, it's certain that anyone would have been allowed to enter and be saved.

The Holy Scriptures play a very important role in warning the people in the modern era about the need to repent and trust in the finished work of Jesus for forgiveness of their sin and deliverance from the tribulation that is prophesied to come upon the earth. People in the western world today have even less of an excuse to say that they haven't been warned since the Bible is readily available to them. In past eras this wasn't always the case. Not everyone has had access to the Bible in order to receive proper instruction about how to become a believer in God and His plan of salvation. Many years after Noah's flood in the Old Testament, there was an era when the Bible became lost to the Jewish people and was rediscovered during the reign of godly King Josiah. This discovery led to a vigorous revival among the Jews. If you desire to read more, this history is found in Second Kings Chapter 22. The moral of the story from Custer's Last Stand and the teachings of the Bible is to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

A prominent theme in the Bible is the prophecy concerning the eventual restoration and spiritual awakening of the Jewish people. In the first reading, we see the Prophet Isaiah making a prediction about the future restoration of the Nation of Israel. The reading is from Isaiah Chapter 2. Read about God's plan for Israel and the prominent place that Jerusalem will play in the future. As you read, underline the word "will" each time it appears in the text.

> *1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that in the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD. (Isaiah 2:1-5)*

In the introduction today, we saw that the prophetic message of the Bible was to listen to God's warnings and to be prepared in order to avoid future judgment. In Isaiah's message, the point wasn't to tell the Jewish people about the need to be prepared, but rather to tell all the people in the world what God will do regarding His People Israel. Isaiah said that in the "last days" God will establish Jerusalem as the true religious capital of the world (v.2). Jerusalem will be where God will live and judge the nations, and the location of His teaching that will go throughout the world (vv. 3-4). God will bring worldwide peace and weapons will be eliminated and converted into devices for peaceful use (v.4). The entire nation of Israel will then walk in the light of the Lord (v.5). Though Isaiah's message wasn't something that we can act upon by being prepared it can bring us hope that God's plan for His people will ultimately prevail and bring worldwide peace. As in-grafted believers in Israel (Romans 11:17) this should provide us with comfort that God can and will work in our lives as well.

In the second reading today (unlike what we saw in the first) we **do** find a calling from God for us to be prepared, as we saw in the opening illustration about Noah. As you read the second reading from Romans, be thinking about some specific actions to which God may be calling you take in your life.

> *11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)*

God told us in verse 12 to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" but then went on to tell us to take off other things. In verse 13 Paul said to "put on the armor of light" and take off drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and envy (v.13) and lust (v.14). Paul said in Colossians 3, "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices" (vv.8-9). God offers us empowerment to be able to take things off through the putting on of the mind of Jesus Christ. There isn't a magical formula about how we can put on the mind of Jesus Christ, but some ways are through the study of His Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. By studying God's Word, seeking the Lord in prayer and fellowshipping with other believers, we start to recognize the patterns of the darkness and begin to make no provision for the flesh (the old way of life apart from Christ) so that we can walk in newness of life. It is a battle, and unless we surrender daily to God's Spirit who gives us the power to resist the Enemy, we will have as much success as Custer in his last stand.

In the Gospel reading today, we leave the Gospel of Luke we studied last week and turn to Matthew and the subject of eschatology, the study of the final events in the history of the world. This section

of Scripture is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley from the Temple. As was the case in the second reading from today, God made a call for people to be prepared. He used an illustration from Noah, whom we discussed today in the introduction.

> *36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matthew 24:36-44)*

The timeline of these future events is near the end of what is known as the tribulation period. The purpose of this seven year span is to restore the Jewish Nation and cause them to follow God (Ezekiel 39:22b). We saw an insight from Isaiah regarding this future restoration in the first reading today. The first event on the prophetic horizon is the return of the Lord for His Church described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." After the Church is removed and after some unknown period of time the tribulation will commence. Just before this section of the text in Matthew we see the introduction of the tribulation period. "[F]or then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall" (Matthew 24:21). What Jesus is explaining in this section is how unbelievers who have survived the seven years of tribulation will be judged and not allowed to enter in God's eternal kingdom in earth, the first thousand years of which is referred to as the millennial reign of Christ. Just as in the days of Noah, God warned the people to repent of their sin and turn to Him for rescue from the coming judgment. In this case God warned the people during the entire seven year period to repent of their sins and to turn to God for salvation (Revelation 16:11). To be certain that everyone heard the message of salvation God even sent an angel that preached from the sky! "And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." (Revelation 14:6-7). Even though everyone heard the warning, not everyone responded. One of the "two men in the field" (v.40) and one of the two women at the mill (v.41) will be taken in judgment (as non-believers) and not allowed to enter into Jesus' kingdom reign on earth. This judgment is known as the "Harvest of the earth" and is described in Revelation 14:19 as "the great winepress of the wrath of God." The other woman and

man are those that came to believe during the tribulation period. They will be allowed to enter into this eternity of peace with God because they responded to the message of salvation offered to them.[1]

What does the teaching in the Olivet Discourse mean to us today? First, we must believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ in order to escape God's coming judgment. Even though we have been warned we must also be prepared by seeking God while it's still possible. Second, God calls us to instruct others so that they also find salvation through the only means possible, faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If we accept God's offer of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus we can have comfort that God will spare us from the tribulation period coming upon the earth (Luke 21:36, 1 Thessalonians 5:9). In addition, we become people of eternity, living for another world and we find that this world is not our home. This changes our daily life because it redefines our value system and priorities. Finally, we must allow God to place us into situations that require us to trust more in God. Saint Paul said, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading we asked you to jot down at least two specific actions to which God is specially calling you take in your life. Pray as follows then read this Scripture again (below).

> *Dear God, You are Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords. I praise you for preserving Your Word in the Bible and making it available to me to read. Please show me what you would have me do regarding the reading from Romans today. I pray this in Jesus' Holy Name, Amen.*
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> 11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

A. Write down the actions that you feel God is calling you to do.

B. Tell at least one other person one of the insights that you gained from your study and answer to your prayer for insight.

2. In the first reading we saw a list of the things that God will do regarding the nation of Israel. Read the following Scripture and write down at least three things that God has promised in His word that He will do for you.

> *4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even*

> *when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:4-9)*

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/120113.cfm First Sunday of Advent

First Reading

Isaiah 2:1-5 NASB 1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that In the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Second Reading

Romans 13:11-14 NASB 11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Gospel Reading (plus skipped verse 36)

Matthew 24:36-44 NASB 36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 "But be sure of

this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

Other Scriptures Used this Week:

2 Kings 22

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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[1] ***Note: There are many different eschatological views and every biblical scholar approaches the text with a certain degree of pre-understanding. We are no different and have arrived at our eschatological view after many years of Bible study. Our position falls into what is known as the futurist, premillenial, and pretribulational view. We believe that there are correct and incorrect views on this subject but strive to hold our position loosely enough that we are open to alternative interpretations and show grace to those who hold these views that God may receive all the glory.***