
Advent 1. Are we ready?

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 30 November

Revelation 1:9-18 • Matthew 24:36-44



Pray: Lord Jesus open your word to us today. Give understanding, and as we understand so might we live, amen.

Introduction: When in life do you need to be the most watchful? When you don't know when something is going to happen.

You come to an uncontrolled intersection. You know there's a chance that cars and trucks will be coming down the road. You just don't know when. What do you do? If you are sensible, and you want to stay alive, you make sure to look and you are ready for what might be coming.

You spend your early years in the sun, maybe in the years before slip slop slap, when it was okay to put coconut oil all over yourself so you would roast up nicely. You know there's a good chance there might be sun damaged cells waiting and ready to mutate into melanoma. You just don't know when.

If you are sensible and you want to stay alive you might want to get a yearly skin check.

You've lived through a few global financial crisis'. You know there will be another one at some stage. You do your best to live within your means. You try to keep a financial buffer so that you are not completely wiped out when whatever bubble we are currently living in bursts.

The people of God were encouraged and warned by prophets down through the ages that the saviour, the Messiah, would come. Those prophecies were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus that first Christmas.

Since that first coming we have the words of encouragement and warning given by Jesus himself that he's coming back

Are we watching? Vs 36-43. Infinitely more important. And I use the word "infinitely" deliberately, because there is much at stake.

Infinitely more important, because eternity is a long time. Vs 44 Are we ready?

That's the Advent question? Are we ready for the coming of Jesus? And this time not baby Jesus? When Jesus comes again it will be as the ascended glorified Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

It is that Jesus we await. It is that Jesus that commands our attention as we ask the Advent question "are we ready for the coming of Jesus?"

Yes, as we set up our advent wreaths and light the first advent candle we are reminded of the hope and light that came into the world that first Christmas.

God for us and with us. We rightly celebrate the greatest of all gifts. A saviour. Our view now though should be directed more to the present and the future. Are we ready?

In our reading from Revelation the Apostle John has a revelation of Jesus. As the book continues its clear it's a particular kind of literature. The word Apocalypse, another title for the book, literally means to lift the veil. Have something uncovered. Get a peak behind the scenes.

It is a wonderful and mysterious book for sure and it needs to be read carefully understanding that it points to three stages of history at once.

It spoke into the time where the Emperor of Rome was regarded as a god. Any resistance to the might of Rome was crushed without mercy. Christians would pay the price as they declared that only Jesus could be called Lord.

They needed hope and encouragement that God was sovereign and all would end well for those who kept the faith and had entrusted their lives to Christ.

The second reality, or historical period, that Revelation points to is the whole period between the first and second coming of Jesus. 2000 years and counting thus far.

In NZ we generally have it easy when it comes to persecution for the sake of Christ. It is not that way for many Christians around the world. When you are paying the price for following Jesus you need perspective and Revelation gives perspective.

The other period Revelation points to is that which comes at the end of time and history as we know it.

To read Revelation correctly means you have to factor in that it spoke to the early followers of Jesus. It speaks to the current followers of Jesus. And it will speak to the future followers of Jesus.

John has a vision of Jesus and something of the veil is lifted. He sees Jesus as he is now. It is beyond our experience and comprehension so John has to try to put it into words.

His eyes were like flames of fire. His face, it was like the sun shining with full force. His voice, it was like the sound of many waters.

He uses symbolism and imagery to try to describe what he saw and experienced. The two edged sword that came from his mouth is a way of saying, God is speaking. The sword in the list of spiritual armour is the word of God, the gospel.

So awesome is the sight, vs 17, “when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

John, during Jesus earthly life, had seen something of the glory of Jesus in the transfiguration. That was pretty awesome. But this is something else. At the transfiguration John was still standing. That was until he heard the voice of God saying “this is my beloved Son, listen to him”.

Here, as John beholds the resurrected, ascended glorified Jesus in all his splendour, he is overcome. “When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.” That is the one we shall see when Jesus returns.

“But he placed his right hand on me saying “do not be afraid. I am the first and the last and the living one. I was dead and see I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys to death and of Hades.”

It is both an awesome and a beautiful picture. Ponder this. If John falls down as dead at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus places his hand on John, what must Jesus be doing? Jesus must be kneeling or crouching down as he places his hand on John and assures him there is no need for fear.

It is comfort not judgement that John experiences.
How and why? Because John and Jesus know each other.

Keep that picture and thought in your mind as we proceed.

Keep it in mind, because we can't talk about being watchful and ready without facing the fact that there are consequences for not being ready.

“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

Jesus is both Saviour and judge.

Let's note the context of our passage this morning. It is part of a three chapter teaching of Jesus. I have a red letter bible. That means all the words of Jesus are in red.

There is no other section of Scripture where you get so much red. Three chapters. 135 vs. 133 are from Jesus. He wants us to understand and be ready for his return.

Three chapters 23-25 are a block. At the beginning of ch 24, vs 1, the disciples draw Jesus attention to the Temple. Jesus answer shocks them. “truly I tell you not one stone will be left here upon another or will be thrown down.”

To those who equated the temple with the presence of God among his people, the end of the temple meant the end of the world. Not unsurprisingly Jesus disciples ask “when”? When?

Be watchful and ready is Jesus' answer.

3 chapters. 133 out of 135 vs. It looks like Jesus is pretty keen we understand something.

- Ch 23 Judgment of the teachers and religious folk who are working against the purposes of God.

- Ch 24 what is coming and our need to be ready.
- Ch 25, more about being ready, and if we want get a bit more unpacking around the separation that is spoken of in our passage, one will be taken and one will be left, the sheep and goats section of ch 25 gives us an indication of why redlines is so important.

I probably should say there are all sorts of thoughts theories about the end times and a good amount of surmising and speculation.

So let's just say the one thing that is very clear and plain from Jesus teaching is that when Jesus comes some will be ready and some won't. Some will be taken to be with him and some won't.

Let's break the passage in to 4.

- Vs 36, the fact no one but the Father knows when the end will be.
- Vs 37-39 Noah and the flood as a historic example of unexpected Judgement as the pointer to the next judgement coming at an unexpected time.
- Vs 40-41 the theme of separation
- Vs 42-44 the need to be ready.

Down through the ages many have predicted and declared that the end is nigh. So far 100% of them have been wrong.

Vs 36 Jesus himself said such things were only known by the Father so it would seem that supposition and speculation is somewhat pointless. Jesus words in vs 36 keeps us where we need to be, on our toes, but not in the clouds of speculation.

Vs 37-39 Noah and the flood is given as the a historic example of unexpected Judgement. Folks were simply getting on with life.

Noah and his family could well have taken 120 years to build the Ark, so in a sense there was warning something was coming.

But I guess the people just though Noah was mad. Building a boat in the middle of a desert. When it started to rain it was both unexpected, and too late to get on board.

Vs 40-41 the theme of separation. One will be taken one will be left. I so wish that bits like that were not in the Bible. But they are. And it is Jesus that is talking about it.

Vs 42-44 the need to be ready.

We know that eventually there will be an end. We just don't know when and because of that we need to be ready now. Watchful and ready is the key.

Sometimes as a clergyman I've been asked the question "do I think we are living in the end days?"

My general answer is this "I haven't got a clue. But I know that today will be the end day for someone".

"When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me saying "do not be afraid." I am the first and the last and the living one. I was dead and now I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys to death and of Hades."

Let's pray: down through the ages the faithful have awaited your coming. "Come Lord Jesus" has been a cry of hope and expectation.

As we live this day in the hope of that day, we cry "come Lord Jesus". May your love and grace abound to those who need it, that your coming this day might make us ready for your coming that day, amen.