

Be prepared

Third Sunday
before AdventMatthew 25. 1 – 13
1 Thessalonians 4. 13 – 18

We are getting near Advent Sunday - three weeks to go and we are thinking about the Kingdom of Jesus.

It is not just about God stuff happening here and now. It is about a time that will come, maybe soon? when Jesus will return visibly as King, and this world, and the church and its mission, will all cease.

And those who are in -
will be with Jesus at the feast in heaven and those who are not - will not. It is true.

Jesus said lots of things - always true. But now and again - he said things that have a sort of eternal truth.

Not just "it looks like rain today", but "people who do this, will not get into heaven."

And when he spoke one of his eternal truths he stuck a label on what he said
Old bible - "verily, I say unto you"
New bible - "I tell you the truth"
The "verily" word, the word for "truth", is actually "**Amen.**"
"**Amen**; I say to you ... "

In the story of the foolish girls who missed out on the wedding feast the bridegroom says
"Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."
It is an "**Amen**" saying. Eternal truth. This is something very important.

God has given us a way to know him.
To be forgiven and accepted by God.
It is God's chosen way. There is no other way.
But we have to **take** it.

And there are those who will not.

Now just to make sure that we know
what Jesus is talking about,
before these parables of Judgement in Matthew 25
we have some very clear teaching in Matthew 24.

People who like the nice bits of the Bible
but are uncomfortable with some of the harder truths
like to miss these bits out.

They don't like the bits of the Bible that tell us
about what will happen at the end.

If you want to believe that the present age
when people can choose to follow Jesus or not
will go on forever, the door will never be shut -
Read the Bible! And learn!

And these aren't just obscure fragments
that eccentric people have developed into a fantasy -
this is plain speaking by Jesus - in the open -
for a whole chapter. Matthew 24.

I will just pick out a couple of verses
but it is all very important.

Matthew 24. 27

*For as lightning that comes from the east
is visible even in the west
so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

It could be lightning, as in a thunder storm,
or it could be the brightening of the sky just before dawn,
But it will be seen all around the world.
The sun comes up, and there is no hiding it.

So, says Jesus, will be this event, which he describes as
the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus is going to appear on the earth
and there will be no hiding the fact.

It will not be something just the Mormons notice.
They believe Jesus has already returned
and so we are in the latter days -
the days after Jesus' Second Coming.

Jesus says, everyone will know very soon.

And what is this "coming of the Son of Man"?

Matthew 27. 30,31

*At that time, the sign of the Son of Man
will appear in the sky,
and all the nations of the earth will mourn.
They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds
of the sky, with power and great glory.
And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call,
and they will gather his elect from the four winds,
from one end of the heavens to the other.*

Jesus says,
that Jesus will appear in the sky, on the clouds,
with power and great glory.

And at that time, all his chosen will be gathered
from every part of the earth.

It is only going to happen once, but it will happen.

and we do not know the day or the hour.

This is one of the themes of 1 Thessalonians.

They know that this world will not last forever.

They thought that the visible return of Jesus
on the clouds with the angels
would happen soon.

(The reason why not - the delay of the "*Parousia*"
is a topic for theological essays
and books have been written ...)

And they were worried, because as the years went past
some of the converts in Thessalonica
had grown old and died.

Will they miss out on the heavenly banquet?
And Paul says, no.

Our passage today and next week
end of chapter 4, and beginning of chapter 5
spells it all out.

When Jesus returns, 1 Thessalonians 4. 11

*God will bring with Jesus,
those who have died in him.*

Notice the important phrase "in him"
this is those who die in faith.

And he reminds them of Jesus' teaching, 4. 16

*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven,
with a loud command,
with the voice of the archangel
and with the trumpet call of God,
and the dead in Christ will rise first.
After that, we who are still alive and are left
will be caught up, together with them,
in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.
And so we will be with the Lord forever.
Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

These words really are encouraging.

One way or another -
by death, or at Jesus' Second Coming -
we shall all meet with the Lord in the air
and be with him forever.

This is so important.

This is Jesus' promise, about our eternal destiny.
Not "cloud cuckoo land", but how it will be.

So this time of year especially,
we look again at these bits of scripture
and remind ourselves of Jesus' promise.

When we pray "your kingdom come"
this is what we mean.

And we have this dual view.

We look forward to being taken from this world
to greet Jesus in the next.

But we also look at this world, and do our best
to get other people to say "yes" to Jesus
so they will not miss out.

Part of us prays - "come soon Lord."
and part of us prays - "give us time to gather more in."

And if we take both of those seriously
then we will be urgent about mission.

Mission is not about keeping up numbers in church.
It is about people who might miss out
on the banquet with Jesus in heaven.
Jesus wants them to be there, they have an invite.

There are people we know,
who do not know that Jesus loves them
and who do not know
how to respond to his loving invitation.

It is our job to tell them.
Jesus has told us to do this job.
And he helps us to do it.

We must take his mission seriously.

Setting the Scene

I wonder how many people here
have ever been late for something?

Perhaps you were on your way - but you got delayed
and when you arrived, they had started without you.

Who has been late for school?
Is it as it used to be at my school
if you were late, they locked the door
and you had to go in a different way
and "report late" - name in a book - in trouble.

What does it feel like
when you know you should be somewhere else?
Sinking feeling? Fear? Panic?

Has anyone ever missed - a train, or a plane!
You are almost in time -
but they have locked the door.

It was like that in Noah's Ark - remember?
Apart from Noah and his family
everyone scoffed!
Building his big boat on dry land.

Then the rain came - and the floods.
Noah got everyone and everything on board -
then it says - "God shut the door".

We know - that anyone not on board - would drown.
Dreadful.

It was the same at the wedding
in Jesus' story.

Don't know why they were waiting for the bridegroom?

But they were all supposed to be ready
and some weren't.

So they started the party - the feast -
with those who were there.
And "the door was shut."

Is this about a wedding feast? Not really.

It is about being in heaven with Jesus.

And it means - some - many - will be at the feast.

But some - will be shut out. That is awful!

What did the people outside do?
They knocked on the door.

And Jesus said,
"I tell you the truth, I don't know you"

Again - that is awful!
To be asking Jesus - "let me in"
And Jesus turns you away.

That is not what we expect.
Jesus loves everybody.
What is going on?

Jesus tells the story
because he wants us to know the truth.

For a while - now - if anyone turns to Jesus
he says - "welcome!"

But there is a day, we don't know when,
when it will be too late
for those who have not yet joined Jesus' party.

So Jesus is giving a warning.
Do not wait. Do not mess about.
Jesus invites you now - say "yes" now.

because if you spend some time in your life saying,
I do not want to know Jesus yet,
you may leave it too late.

Now I hope everyone here has said "yes" to Jesus' invite.
(If you haven't - listen to his warning.)
But you might have friends who have not.

There is an urgency to mission.

Jesus finishes the story
*"Therefore keep watch,
you do not know the day or the hour"*

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More later, if there is a later.