



Sermon

Jesus is Coming Back Again

{Mark }

3rd December 2017

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If you have been around the Christian church a bit, you will probably know that Jesus has promised to come again. This is what Advent is about.

But why did Jesus go back to heaven after he rose from the dead? He nullified the power of death by his own death. He rose victorious. Surely that would have been a good time to mop up the opposition and establish his rule on the earth?

Yes, but he wants to do it in partnership with us, so it looks a bit different than if he just did it by himself. Amazing! After we let him down so badly the first time, he comes to give us a second chance. So right now we are in a training ground. We are learning to rule and reign in life under our great King, to take back the authority we gave to Satan in the Garden of Eden, to live under Jesus' leadership and act as his representatives, wherever we find ourselves in life.

What does that look like in practice?

Well, we exercised faith and worked in partnership with the Lord as we planned and saved and built this building. It wasn't always easy. Remember when we got the final quote from the builders and it was \$67,000 more than we had to spend? It looked like the end of our hopes.

Ian remembers that sinking feeling, but he prayed and the Lord led him to **Matthew 17:20** "*...you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.*"

Then the Lord highlighted **Zechariah 4:7** "*What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground.*" And Ian discovered that verse was in the context of building the temple!

So he prayed, "Lord I don't have the faith for \$67,000 to come in, but because you say to command this mountain, I will." So he said, "In the name of Jesus, mountain of Insufficient Money, be uprooted and cast into the sea!" Then he presented the situation to the congregation and \$152,000 came in! Amazing! He acted with a very small mustard seed of faith, in obedience to the Lord's prompting.

Of course, we don't deal in those big figures every day. But don't let the large amount of money stop you seeing that hearing God's word, plus obeying, equals faith.

So that's an example of our working with the Lord to mop up the opposition and extend his Kingdom as we wait for his second coming.

Let's open our Bibles at Mark 13. In verses 1-23, Jesus described the things that were about to take place before the destruction of the temple. That took place in AD70. He warned his hearers very specifically, "When you see these signs - flee Jerusalem!" Many of those in Jerusalem in AD70 saw the signs, remembered Jesus' words and did flee to safety.

Our reading today, then, starts in v24 with Jesus saying "*After **those** days, after **that** tribulation,*" and describes a cosmic cataclysm which will herald his coming. It involves the whole of the created universe: the sun, the moon, the stars, and "the powers in the heavens."

This includes both physical and spiritual places and beings. The only other Biblical reference to the 'powers of the heavens' is in **Isaiah 24:21**

"In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below."

Both earthly kings who oppose God and his people as well as spiritual powers in the heavenly places will be punished. They will have their come-uppance.

When he comes, Jesus says in Mark 13, he will send his holy angels to the four corners of the world to gather his people, from all the corners of heaven and from every place on earth. John and Tito and their churches will be gathered and we at St Stephen's will be gathered too, as well as those whom we love who have gone to heaven already. Everyone whom God has chosen.

When Jesus talks about his "elect" it means his chosen ones. It is not that he chooses and we have no say in the matter, but that His grace and our response work together.

Romans 8:29 *"For those whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son."*

I hope all of you here know whether you are chosen and predestined by God. If you don't know, have a chat with the prayer team at the end of the service, or with Ian or a home group leader. It is very important to have a confident assurance that you will be gathered up when Jesus comes again. No-one needs to be left out or, to live all their lives in fear of missing out.

I think verse 28 is the start of a new paragraph. Jesus says, "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree:" He talks about how in the natural order of things, we can tell when the leaves start to emerge that summer is on its way. When I had 10 or so days sick with sinusitis recently it was so surprising to come out and see all the lime-green elm trees in our street! It seemed that the leaves had come overnight while I was not looking. I knew that summer had come.

Four disciples had asked him privately, "What will be the sign that the temple is about to be destroyed?" (Verse 4) When you see **these things** happening, Jesus says, you know that it is near, right at the door. Summer is here. When he says "**these things**", I believe he is talking about the whole of the previous paragraph of signs.

Jesus explained what things would be like just before the temple was destroyed but also talked about his return. And that's where today's reading starts. It can be hard to understand the timeline of these events. Many scholars have studied the Bible to see if they could predict the time of Jesus' return. Most importantly, Jesus said (v32) that not even he knew when the day of his return would be, only the Father.

So don't listen to any knowledgeable-sounding person who is convinced he knows when it will be. After many years of study, New Zealander George Curle predicted Jesus would come in 2006, but he was wrong.

Peter, John, James and Andrew wanted to know the specific time. But Jesus did not satisfy their curiosity. And he won't satisfy us when we ask that same question, because he wants us to ask the more important questions:

1. Am I one of the elect who will be gathered and saved at the end of the age? and
2. How can I please and obey the Lord while we are waiting?

One of Jesus' predictions is that before the end comes, the gospel will be preached to all nations (v10). In the past, this made me a bit blasé. "Oh", I thought, "They say there are about another 2,000 people groups who have not yet heard the good news, so I can relax and not be too concerned that the second coming will happen in my lifetime."

But Jesus says, "You do not know what time the end will come." There are amazing, recent stories of ISIS fighters who have had revelations of Jesus in dreams or visions. Who is to say that He might not have been speaking like that to other people groups? So we cannot say, "Let's relax, the day of the Lord won't happen any time soon."

If I said, "It could be tomorrow" - would that can make you think twice? Would it make a difference to the way you lived today and tomorrow?

The end of the world as we know it could come at any time. But we have clear instructions from Jesus as to what we should do while we wait for him to come. V33 says:

"Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come."

We must not act like those lazy servants who slack off while the master is away. **Luke 21** has a slightly fuller account: *"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ³⁵ For it **will come** upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen."*

Don't put all your energy into matters of only earthly importance. Don't let drunkenness make you waste time and focus. These are traps to stop you focussing on your true life in God. Don't be weighed down by anxiety – pray!

This prayer of faith is mentioned in Luke **18:1-8**

*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should **always pray and not give up**. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*

When the Son of Man comes, will people still be bothering to pray and trust God to help? That sounds like a deep longing in Jesus' heart – Will I find faith on the earth when I return?

Faith is believing what Jesus says and acting on it; and asking God to fulfil it in your life. We exercise faith when we pray for someone's healing, or when we tell someone what Jesus means to us. We exercise faith when we refuse to worry about money, trusting Jesus to care for us. We exercise faith when we make obeying Jesus more important than what other people think of us.

What else can we do while we wait for Jesus' return?

What about that parable where king gives a sum of money to his servants, goes away, and there is a reckoning when he returns? Each servant is given the same amount but the three got different returns on their investments. The ones who worked hard and did what they were supposed to be doing, got rewarded. Jesus will commend those of us who take our time, energy, money, talents, and gifts and use them to extend God's kingdom.

In summary, while we wait for Jesus' return, we are to watch, to keep alert, to pray, to avoid getting entangled in the world's affairs or in drunken dissipation. We are to exercise faith and use the gifts God has given us.

He will do his part – He loves to work in co-operation with us. Phil 1:6 says *I am confident of this: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

So as we finish today, let's go back to today's reading in 1 Corinthians:

7...as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

Thanks be to God.