

READING

Matthew 24:30-51

SERMON

Expecting His Coming (Matthew 24:3, 29-51; Revelation 1)

Seems a strange reading for Advent, but today we enter a new series – one called Great Expectations. This is nothing to do with the book by Charles Dickens, but to do with the Great Expectation that are associated with this time of year.

The Jews had great expectations of a Messiah, an anointed one who would come and restore the kingdom that they had under David. The people had been vassals for so long. They had suffered being conquered back and forth from the countries of Egypt in the South and Syria in the North. Then the Greeks came in under Alexander the Great and in the time of Jesus we have the Romans having taken over the area. The Jews were desperate for a Saviour – there was an air of Great Expectation. God has been quiet for some four centuries and they were waiting – waiting for their Saviour.

So we too are people of Great Expectations, we are expecting the Coming of Christ, the coming of Jesus, God the Son. The Jews are still waiting for the First coming of the Messiah, we are awaiting the Second coming of the Messiah.

Jesus gave a long discourse on the end times, what will happen at the end of the age. This is recorded in Matthew chapters 24 & 25. This morning we look at one small part of this whole conversation that Jesus had with the disciples. The first coming was a quiet affair in the stable, the second coming will see

“...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. (Matthew 24:30-31 NIV)

The Son of Man will appear in the sky – like some form of space travel! But this is not the intention of this passage. It is not some space travel before its time. What we have here is a reference to a vision that Daniel had where we read

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14 NIV)

This is a reference that speaks of authority; that speaks of power. At the first coming Jesus was a baby and so had no power. He gave up everything to come to earth. As Paul writes

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8 NIV)

Jesus gave up all power at his first coming – he was a helpless baby born to Mary and being looked after by Mary and Joseph. They had to flee to Egypt to avoid Jesus being killed – that does not sound like the actions of someone with power.

When Jesus returns the second time, as it says in Matthew 24:31, to

“...gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”
(Matthew 24:31 NIV)

as we read before. Jesus will come with authority, with an army of angels, with a loud trumpet call, to gather his elect – those who have chosen to follow Christ, to take Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and follow in his footsteps.

On that first coming, the only fanfare was given to shepherds in the fields. They had the angel choir singing to them, but no-one else had. They were not expecting the coming of the Messiah, even those as a race, as a nation they were expecting the coming of the Chosen One.

So when is the second coming happening? Just like the first one – we do not know. As Jesus said

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.” (Matthew 24:36-41 NIV)

No-one knows not even Jesus – that was something he gave up when he came to earth. Although he was fully God and fully human when on earth, he chose to give up certain information when he emptied himself and became a servant and went to the cross to die for us.

Just as when the flood came in Noah’s day, no-one will know. Just as no-one really knew that Jesus was coming the first time. So if anyone tells you that they have worked out when Jesus is returning again – do not believe them. If Jesus did not know when he was on earth, then no-one else will know.

But if we do not know when he is coming but we are expecting his coming, what do we do? The nearest human comparison I can think of is when we went to Togo. We went to visit the Pastor’s brother-in-law who lived away from the capital where we were staying in a little village. The nearest phone he told us was several kilometres away – too far to just pop to, to make a phone call. So we asked, “How did you know when we were coming?”

His reply was, “Pastor Banarko told me that you would be here on Tuesday on Wednesday.”

We replied, almost in unison, “But today is Thursday!”

How he waited we do not know, but wait he did. However I am sure that life went on until the news came that we had arrived. Jesus told his disciples

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (Matthew 24:42-44 NIV)

To keep watch. If we knew when we were to be burgled we would not leave the house. We would watch and watch and watch. So we must always be ready.

But does this mean we do what some people did on the eve of this Millennium. Some went up hills and just sat there because when the calendar went from 1999 to 2000, the world was going to end and they were to be taken. That is passive waiting – something I seem to do quite a lot as a husband!

But that is not what is envisaged here. We have already had a taster, back in verse 40

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. (Matthew 24:40-41 NIV)

There is work going on. Just as when Jesus came the first time, life goes on, but there should still be that waiting, that expectation of the coming of Jesus, but in an active not a passive way. If we read on from verse 45, Jesus tells this parable

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:45-51 NIV)

Quite a gruesome end for the wicked servant. So how are we to wait? To watch and wait and serve. We are to serve others as faithful and wise servants did so when their master returned they are put in charge of much.

The unworthy or wicked servants are those that exploit others, the ones that

“...beats his fellow-servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.” (Matthew 24:49 NIV)

Of course we do not do that. But do we always seek opportunities to serve others, or do we do things for our own aggrandisement? Do we have a servant heart or is it a selfish heart that only thinks of self?

Are you waiting for the return of Jesus, expecting his coming, or are you like most the first time,. Talking about it, but then missing the event and denying that it even occurred! But what are we waiting for whilst being servants? John. In old age, whilst exiled to the island of Patmos had a vision. In the vision he records

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:7-8 NIV)

There it is again, the vision from Daniel, the one coming in the clouds with authority, with power and then John goes on. But before I read that I would like us all to listen, to picture in our mind's eye what the picture of. It is a glorious image of Jesus when he will return. You may want to close your eyes and just listen. Listen to these words from Scripture, although I will be interspersing them with an explanation as we go along.

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man,"

dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.

The mark of a person of distinction. Not a work person, but someone who is not working.

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow,

The Ancient of Days, one who has wisdom and the dignity of age

and his eyes were like blazing fire.

Shows energy and spiritedness, which is a counterbalance to the dignity of age

His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace,

His feet were purified with fire, so are pure

and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

The voice of God is likened to the sound of rushing waters by the prophet Ezekiel

In his right hand he held seven stars,

This speaks of protection. The stars, the churches being held gently in the hand of God, of Jesus

and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.

This speaks of judgement and that his word does give a standard – this counterbalances the protection. God does not like sin.

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. (Revelation 1:12-16 NIV)

When Jesus was transfigured in front of Peter, James and John, his appearance became like the noon day sun, the sun in all its strength.

And John's reaction to the vision he saw

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (John 1:17-18 NIV)

John worshipped the risen Christ, the one who is coming again. Expect his Coming. Wait, watch and serve.