

AM Matthew 25:31-46 & Revelation 22 "Surely I am coming soon"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 January 2024

Preacher: Mr Cameron MacIver

- [0 : 00] I have two readings, as you'll see from the notice sheet. I'm reading firstly from Matthew chapter 25, verse 31, on page 1002 of the Church Bible.
- So Matthew chapter 25, it is here in the few days leading up to the crucifixion and then the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- It's at Passover week in Jerusalem and our Lord Jesus is speaking about his second coming, his return in glory and power, the day we are waiting for.
- So verse 31 of Matthew chapter 25 to the end of the chapter. When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.
- Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people, one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
- [1 : 29] Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
- For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.
- I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me. And the king will answer them.
- Truly, I say to you. And you did it to one of the least of these my brothers. You did it to me.
- Then he will say to those on the left, depart from me. You cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
- [3 : 05] For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. Naked and you did not clothe me.
- Sick and in prison and you did not visit me. And they also will answer saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?
- Then he will answer them saying, truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.
- And these will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous into eternal life.
- Well, I see Cameron has arrived. I was going to carry on reading Revelation 22. Should I do that or you'll come in?
- [4 : 14] Thank you. It is the very last chapter of the Bible. Revelation chapter 22. I will read the whole chapter.
- Revelation 22. I'll just check. I'm going to read it from this Bible just in case. In case there are any small differences.
- So, Revelation 22. This is the end of the revelation that was given to the Apostle John.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

Also on either side of the river, the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

[5 : 17] No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it. And his servants will worship him. They will see his face. And his name will be on their foreheads.

And night will be no more. There will be no need of light of lamp or sun. No need of light of lamp or sun. For the Lord God will be their light. And they will reign forever and ever.

And he said to me, These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits and of the prophets, the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.

And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. I, John, am the one that heard and saw these things.

And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me. But he said to me, You must not do that. I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book.

[6 : 29] Worship God. And he said to me, Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book. For the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil.

Let the filthy still be filthy. And the righteous still do right. And the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon. Bringing my reckons of pence with me.

To repay everyone for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega. The first and the last. The beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes.

So that they may have the right to the tree of life. And that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs. The sorcerers. And the sexually immoral.

And the murderers. And idolaters. And everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things.

[7 : 26] For the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David. The bright morning star. The spirit and the bride say, come. And let the one who hears say, come.

And let the one who is thirsty, come. And let the one who desires take the water of life without price. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book.

If anyone adds to them. God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy. God will take away his share in the tree of life.

And in the holy city. Which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says. Surely I am coming soon. Amen.

Come Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen. If you have your Bibles open.

[8 : 27] It's good to turn back to Revelation 22. And we're going to be focusing our thoughts this morning on verse 20.

Revelation 22 and verse 20. He who testifies to these things says. Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

I wonder this morning if you were willing to take part in an experiment. A thought experiment with me. Imagine for a moment that you did not have any of the New Testament.

In fact imagine if you had been born over 2000 years ago. You would be waiting.

If you had access to the Old Testament. You'd be waiting for the birth of the Messiah. And most of us I'm sure have just not long ago celebrated Christmas.

[9 : 30] I will have heard probably the famous prophecies that we read almost every year. From Isaiah and Micah and various places.

Telling us some of the details of the circumstances of the birth of the Messiah. But just try and imagine for a moment that that's all you had.

How would that work for you? How would it help you know the details about the circumstances, this time and the place? Would we have known to go and stand by the manger in Bethlehem.

Waiting for this great event. No, we wouldn't. In fact, one of the things that always amazes me.

At Christmas time when we read these things. There's a remarkable instance. Read almost every year. Herod, King Herod. He goes and asks the chief priests, the scribes.

[10 : 32] And he says, well where is the Messiah to be born? And so it just trips off their tongue it seems to me. They say, well in Bethlehem and Judea as it's written in the prophet Micah. And it didn't help them, did it?

It didn't help them know what they were looking for in detail. Well, the book of Revelation places us in exactly the same position as people at that time were.

Those people were in that position with regard to the coming of Christ. The birth of the Messiah. And Revelation is the same. It's a prophecy and it places us in the same position with regard to the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

We have a prophecy but we don't know all of the details. We don't know exactly how they'll be fulfilled. But this is the most important prophecy that we have.

Giving us the information we need to know about these events. And yet as I was saying to the children this morning, so often we neglect this book.

[11 : 47] Why is it that we... Maybe I'm wrong. I know that you did have a sermon on Revelation just a few weeks ago. I checked on the website.

But in general we're sometimes hesitant, aren't we, to turn to Revelation in our private devotions or in our own reading. And why is that?

There's a few reasons. Just briefly to mention that one of the reasons we're scared of it is that it can be divisive.

There are people, I'm sure you know, there are false teachers. There are sects. And there are even some misguided but sincere Christians who pore over the numbers and the details of what's revealed to us in this part of the Bible.

And come up with all kinds of fantastical schemes which don't help at all. But they cause division because somebody gets hung up on it.

[12 : 51] And they insist that, oh, I've found out that this means, you know, the European Union or whatever. And it causes anxiety and division.

And another reason that we sometimes avoid spending much time in this part of the Bible is because we just don't understand it. And I think it's good to be honest.

And especially if you have young children, it's good for them to know that there are parts of the Bible that when we read them we're not 100% sure what exactly they mean.

And that's okay. It's okay to admit that we're not quite sure exactly how this prophecy will be fulfilled. In the same way as those who lived before the birth of Christ would have had to have admitted the same thing.

But it's also a book that's frightening. And that's probably the main reason, isn't it, that we don't read it. Because it seems quite frightening.

[13 : 56] But almost the first words that Jesus says are fear not in chapter 1. And Jesus wouldn't say that unless we were likely to seem a bit fearful when we read what is revealed in this prophecy.

But Jesus says to us, fear not. Because when we understand it rightly, there's no need for us to fear. And when we understand it rightly, what we need to do is focus, I believe, on the main and plain things that are taught in this book.

And the main and plain teaching of this book is that Jesus is going to return soon. And he's coming back victorious.

And it's a great trick of the devil to tell us to spend less time in this part of the Bible. Because the more we see this, the better a perspective we have on what it means for us to live as the church.

This book is given to us in the church age as we live out our lives between these two events. Between Christ's crucifixion, his ascension and his return.

[15 : 23] And this book gives us a big dose of reality for us. If we thought that being a Christian was going to be like living in a fairy tale, then this book quashes that idea altogether for us.

It describes conflict. Conflict at every level. And conflict that, if we're honest, we should recognize as part of our lives as Christians.

Being a Christian is a bit like fighting a gorilla. We cannot stop because we're tired. Or because we're getting old.

Or because we're injured. Or offended. Or too young. We have to keep going. But it's very different from fighting a gorilla because this book reveals to us that being a Christian means that you are guaranteed victory.

It tells us that we will need to fight, but that we're guaranteed victory. And as I say, the main and plain teaching here relates to Christ's return.

[16 : 43] And that is what seals the victory for us. So this morning, just in the time that remains, I want us to briefly notice a couple of things about this verse.

Let's read it again. He who testifies to these things says, Surely I am coming soon.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Here we see a prophecy that's being fulfilled. And a prayer that's being answered.

Just have two points really this morning. The book of Revelation is very clear. That it is a prophecy. It stays explicitly in chapter 1, verse 3.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. And you'll see that again, at the end of the book, chapter 22, that we read together in verse 7.

[17 : 43] I'm coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. So it's very, very straightforwardly telling us that it's a prophecy. And the main point of which is that Jesus will return.

But of course this isn't new news to us. The fact of the day of judgment is something that's been known since the beginning of time, I would suggest.

Certainly, if you look at Jude just before Revelation, there we have an authoritative account of a prophecy made by Enoch. Seventh from Adam, famously.

Who says, Behold the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on all. It's clear that he is referring to an arrival of the Lord who will come in judgment.

And that's clear all through the Old Testament. It's clear that this is to happen. If you read another early part of the Bible, it's the book of Job. And Job, as he discusses with his three friends, it's very, very clear that he has an expectation that there is a final day.

[18 : 56] A day where there will be an account required. And a day where Job's Redeemer will come on the earth and he will see him. And as the Old Testament progresses, as we move through time, we get more information, we get more detail.

And so, for example, it becomes even clearer in a place like Daniel chapter 12. In Daniel 12 we read that multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

So, anyone who says that the doctrine of a day of judgment, a doctrine of a return of Christ to bring this judgment, anyone who says that that is not in the Old Testament is just wrong.

And of course, famously, we have it on good authority that they're wrong because Christ himself roundly condemned the Sadducees, didn't he? He says, the Sadducees who didn't believe in a resurrection, he says, you are in error because you do not know the scriptures.

But actually, it's Jesus himself who consistently and repeatedly tells us that that is the plan. He will return.

[20 : 27] Let me take you through some of these references. Speaking to his disciples, Matthew 16 verse 27. The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father.

On the Mount of Olives, Matthew 24 verse 30. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. The reading that Norman read just a few moments ago, Matthew 25 verse 31.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. And in that passage, we had some clear and plain detail of what will happen when Christ returns.

And there are many of these passages which are paralleled in Matthew and Mark and Luke. Luke 9 verse 26, for example. For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation.

Of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels. And again, before the high priest on Christ's trial, he's asked straightforwardly, blankly question as to whether he is the Messiah.

[21 : 47] And he says, I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. And in a more intimate teaching before his disciples.

In John, for example, John 14. I'll go and prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come again to take you to myself.

Perhaps you feel I'm over-egging it going on and on with this list of references. But be assured, there are many more I could quote.

Jesus teaches clearly and unambiguously in all four Gospels. That it is the plan that he will return to judge the earth.

And in our text this morning, we see that even after his ascension, the last thing that he wants to remind the church of, and his last words to the church you could say, are, surely I am coming soon.

[22 : 57] Well, hopefully I've made that point. But we do need to be reminded of it. And when it comes to the practical application of this point, I want to put that back to yourselves.

You need to discuss it amongst yourselves. How should this teaching change how we live? How should it change our conversation?

Our conversation with non-Christians, for example. Many of us are a little bit embarrassed, perhaps, in conversations with non-Christians, to talk about our expectation of a literal return of Christ.

It makes us seem a bit cranky in the eyes of the world. But it's what the Bible clearly teaches. And it's definitely what will happen.

And there's a sense in which perhaps it's a bit unfair to withhold that information from non-Christians that we're speaking to, just because we're anxious not to be seen as, you know, having strange views or whatever.

[24 : 07] And Christ himself, as well as telling us all about these references, he gives us these parables about situations where people are waiting for something to happen, waiting for a bridegroom to arrive, a master who goes away and leaves his servants in charge.

And it's clear that we're expected to behave as if we expect Christ's return at any point. So it's a prophecy that's being fulfilled.

And it's very clear. It's also an answered prayer. Let's read it again. Surely I am coming soon.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus. I wonder if you read that quite slowly, do you think? It seems to be in the wrong order.

Would it not have made more sense if John had prayed, Come Lord Jesus. And Jesus had replied, Surely I am coming soon.

[25 : 22] But it's the other way round in verse 20 here for us. Is that strange? Well, yes, a little bit.

But actually, what's happening here in this verse is a biblical pattern that we see throughout Scripture. And we don't have time to look at it in detail.

And for that reason, I'd encourage you, if you have opportunity, perhaps this afternoon, refresh your memory about Daniel chapter 9. Daniel 9 is one of my favourite passages to turn to.

In relation to prayer, and how prayer works. And it's something that we need to think about more and more. When we read Daniel chapter 9, we'll see that Daniel's been studying the Scriptures, and he's come to the realisation that the length of the period of the exile is going to be 70 years.

He's realised that that's what the Scriptures plainly teach. And I greatly fear that if you or I came to that conclusion about something from the Scriptures, we might say, well, that's great.

[26 : 34] I can now just sit back and wait for that to happen. But that's not what Daniel does. He realises that that is what has been prophesied. And then he prays and asks God to do what he has already planned to do.

And there's something amazing, as you read on in chapter 9 of Daniel, you'll see how the fulfilment, the answer to that prayer, is given in a special way.

And so, God hears and answers that prayer and is moved to act and brings, in Daniel's case, the period of the exile to an end.

Well, how does this apply to our verse this morning? Well, it's plain, I hope, because we are told to pray for Jesus to return.

In many places. Think of the Lord's Prayer. Your kingdom come. Think also of what we do when we have communion, when we have the sacrament of communion.

[27 : 52] As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. The Apostle Peter, in his letter, urges us to hasten the coming of the day of God.

And most poignantly for me, Revelation 6 describes the souls of those martyred calling out from under the altar. How long, O Lord? Remarkable.

Whenever we look through our New Testament and see the number of times that the day of the Lord is mentioned, nowhere, nowhere are we asked to pray that it would be put off for a while so that we can get our house in order.

Nowhere are we asked to pray that it would be delayed in any way. We're always asked to pray that it would be soon.

It's something that Christians are asked to look forward to. And if we are Christians, we are to long for that day. What a privilege to have Daniel's prayer answered in that way.

[29 : 11] and to be in some way involved in the bringing of the exile to an end through prayer. What a greater privilege we can have as God's people to pray that Christ would return.

So it's a prophecy that's being fulfilled but it's also a prayer that's being answered. And one of the features of the way it's phrased in the book of Revelation which is really striking is that it's described as something that's already happening.

In Revelation 1 Jesus says I am coming soon. And those who study Greek tell me that the text the tense I am coming soon here describes something that's already underway.

And this is kind of difficult for us isn't it? Because just as we come to a close we wonder is it really going to be soon? Because it's been true for 2,000 years so can it be soon?

And there are also those who study the book of Revelation and say well if you look carefully there are certain things that have to happen before Christ returns.

[30 : 50] Does that mean it can't be soon? Well what are these things that have to happen? Just very briefly very very briefly there are those who say that Revelation teaches that there will be a great intensification of persecution and wickedness before the Lord returns.

Well that in a sense is the easiest of all. Anyone who is sensitive to the truth of the Bible and who looks around the world can surely see that it is true that there is an intensification of wickedness and that there is an intensification of persecution.

as I was preparing to preach I thought I'd have a quick look because I'd heard that in Nigeria thousands literally thousands of Christians have been killed for being Christians in the last year.

And when I looked it up 200 killed in the Christmas holiday period 5,000 displaced from their homes eight churches burned down just in the last couple of weeks.

For those people the intensification that's spoken of in Revelation is very real. What about those who say Revelation teaches that there will be a time of incredible prosperity for the church before Christ returns?

[32 : 31] It seems to be in conflict doesn't it with what I just said about an intensification of wickedness but if you think about it the two are not mutually exclusive and again for us here we perhaps think well the church here is weak and struggling.

Let's be honest about that. It is. we have many reasons to lament here in the church in Scotland but if you broaden your horizons and look at what's this condition of the church in other parts of the world we see fantastic growth we see amazing stories of people turning to Christ in Asia in Africa in China in these places there are more Christians than there ever have been and so it's also true that there is as we speak a time of great prosperity for the church then there are some who say that before Christ returns there will be a great revival amongst people of Jewish heritage this is something that is debated but I think it's taught quite clearly in Romans 11 that that will happen and so do we need to wait for that before we are really on the lookout for Christ's return

I would say no I mean think of your own conversion was it contingent on any other event God could bring huge numbers of Jewish people to faith saving faith in Christ this morning it's not a difficult thing for God to do and so there's nothing holding up Christ's return it could happen soon and that's what revelation teaches us some of these verses we've looked at already revelation 1 7 behold he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him even those who pierce to him revelation 3 11 I am coming soon revelation 16 15 behold I'm coming like a thief unexpected and in this chapter three times we're told

I'm coming soon we've seen in verse 7 I'm coming soon in verse 12 I'm coming soon and in our text here I'm coming soon why three times in one chapter for emphasis surely for emphasis well if you're a Christian there are a number of points of application from these doctrines we can be encouraged because it's not long to go if you're fighting a gorilla you hope that soon the end will come and that you will win but it's like that for us as Christians the end will be soon also a point of application is that we should remember to pray that it would be soon we are to hasten we must obey what is before us pray that soon Christ would return and when we do this hopefully that will change some of our behaviours others but obviously it's a great sin for me as a preacher to come and not mention the fact that if you're not a Christian this morning then this is a terrifying prospect the return of Christ and as we bring our service to a close

I want to draw your attention to verse 11 of our chapter it's a wee bit mysterious I don't really know exactly what that means I haven't really studied it either but it's as if it's too late isn't it what it says in verse 11 but it isn't too late it's a bit like I would say I understand that verse a little bit the way the Ninevites understood the message that Jonah gave them 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed and the Ninevites being reasoning people thought well surely no one would give a warning unless there was hope that action could be taken that's how Revelation presents the return of Christ so imminent so imminent that it's almost as if it's too late there is real urgency here

[37 : 49] I hope that all of us here will trust in Christ for our salvation Amen and may God bless these thoughts to us■■■ love everything again love again B