

Alert but Not Alarmed

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[0 : 00] Is the year 2012 the year Jesus' return? Are you anticipating the return of Jesus?

Are you awaiting World War III? Are you happy that the end is near?

Amen.

Amen. I have no idea what that video is about. I do know that it used to be called 2008, the return of Jesus.

They adjusted that when that didn't happen. I think I told you about that last week. And one other thing I don't understand is, why was there a picture of a bearded lady up there at the end there?

[1 : 36] I don't get that. I know it's not really what we're going to talk about tonight, but I do know that when Jesus comes, he's going to have a tattoo on his thigh. He's going to be riding a horse and carrying a sword.

He's not going to look like a 35-year-old woman with major testosterone issues. Just so you know. Last week we talked about, we took the first part of Luke 21, and we talked about the destruction of Jerusalem.

And my main point was that Jesus prophesied about the fall of Jerusalem around 37 years before it happened, and he got detailed, the details absolutely right.

This historical event, the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus prophesied about that before it happened. And my point was that if he came back this week, we would hear Jesus talking about his return and the end of the world, which is yet to come, obviously, and that we could trust him as he teaches us about that event because his prophecy is true.

His prophecy has proved true in the past. And so tonight we're going to be talking about the return of Jesus. You can see it in the reading tonight. Verse 27 talked about the Son of Man coming.

[2 : 53] Verse 28 talked about your redemption coming. Verse 31 talked about the kingdom of God coming. And of course, they all to do with the same event, which is Jesus' return to this earth.

So that's what we're going to focus on tonight. My prayer is that you guys would do as Jesus teaches us to do and stay alert because his coming could come at any time.

Maybe it will be 2012, maybe 3,012, but Jesus is coming and we need to be prepared for that. So why don't I pray for us before we start?

Father, there is so much rubbish being said about your return.

There's so much that is tied in with politics and with bad theology, with false teaching, false prophets, misinterpretation of your word.

[3 : 53] So I pray now as we look at the words of Jesus written for us, that we would humble ourselves, that we wouldn't be distracted by those poor images that we have in our minds of bad theology and etc.

But that you would teach us powerfully as we look at your words. I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to dive straight in. Please have your Bibles open. We're just going to see what Jesus says and what that means for us today.

So let's start at verse 25. He says, There will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars and on the earth, distress among nations, confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

These are some of the signs, Jesus says, that will take place before he returns. Matthew and Mark give us a little bit more detail. They say that before Jesus returns, the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its light and the stars will fall from the sky.

And you get here in the Gospels, a lot of Old Testament apocalyptic kind of symbology. So if you read the Old Testament books that refer to the end of time, you'll notice that these kind of themes come up as well.

[5 : 19] Things happening in the heavens and in the seas and unrest on the earth. And so it's hard to say exactly how literally we should take this. For all I know, and I believe that this could well be very true, that the stars will fall from the sky, that the sun will be darkened.

But it doesn't matter really. What it's getting at is that everyone on earth is going to be affected by the signs that are shown to us before Jesus returns.

You see, last week I talked about signs that were going to be given to Christians in the first century to let them know that the fall of Jerusalem was about to happen. And remember, they saw those signs, they interpreted them literally, and they were saved.

They left the city before it was completely destroyed. And now Jesus is giving signs to the whole earth. Signs in the stars, in the sky, signs in the sea, they affect us all.

We're kind of surrounded by these signs before Jesus returns. We find that in Isaiah and other books in the Old Testament and also Jesus obviously refers to them now.

[6 : 23] And the result will be that the nations, right, everybody that is, the nations will be confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

That word for confused is, it only occurs once in the New Testament and it kind of means that the feeling of the word is of being at a loss, confused, stunned, at a loss.

And you guys have seen this on TV recently, right, with the fire and the flood. Renee, my wife, is a paramedic. She's been up there at King Lake quite a bit and I ask her how things have gone when she comes home at the end of the day and every day she'll tell me about the people because she's a beautiful Christian gal and she cares for people.

And so she'll tell me that the people are walking around stunned. They're at a loss. That's what this word is getting at. When we're faced with calamities like we have been, it stuns us.

We're at a loss to explain. We're at a loss to figure out how this happened. The fire came through so quickly we didn't have any warning. We're at a loss. And Jesus says that's what will happen to the nations of the world when these signs start to appear before his return.

[7 : 44] So what's the result of these signs? Let's look at verse 26 to 28. Jesus says, People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world.

For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.

You'll notice there that there are two groups of people that Jesus describes. Did you pick that up? There are two sets of responses to these signs and to the coming of Jesus on the clouds when he returns.

One set of response, one response is that people faint. They faint with fear and foreboding at what is coming.

These are the people who have spent their lives ignoring Jesus, rejecting Jesus, scoffing at Christians, mocking God. People of religions that reject Jesus and belittle Jesus.

[8 : 58] People from secular humanistic society who reject Jesus as an old myth, something to be done away with. Even nice people like perhaps some of you who are here tonight in church who kept coming to church but never laid your life down at the feet of Jesus, never surrendered to Jesus, never confessed him as Lord.

These are the people who will faint from fear and foreboding. They see Jesus, they see the signs, they see Jesus coming and they faint because they know that he is coming to judge them and that they don't have any time left to repent.

I speak to a lot of young guys who love money and toys and parties and over and over again they'll say to me, I'm going to live my life now and I'm going to sort out that other stuff later when I've got a wife and kids, they can go to church, I'll figure that out later.

There's no time when Jesus comes in the clouds. There's no time to figure it out anymore. You're going to be judged and it's not going to go well for you if you don't repent and believe the gospel as Trev urged us to do.

The passage is clear that this could happen at any time. any time. The other group of people are the people who have been faithful to Jesus.

[10 : 37] They're the people who through persecution, through hardship, maybe just through everyday life have been faithful to Jesus. They love Jesus. They confess him as Lord.

They accept his free offer of forgiveness. forgiveness. They acknowledge what he did on the cross. They worship him every day of their lives and when that day comes and it might come tonight, when it comes and they see Jesus coming in the clouds, they lift up their heads because they know that their redemption is finally here.

After all these years of slogging it out being a Christian, their redemption has come. Jesus is coming to take us home to heaven. no more crying, no more tears, no more fire or floods.

Their redemption has arrived and so they lift their heads and they welcome him. Which group are you going to belong to?

I don't mean in 25 years when Jesus comes. I don't mean in 70 years when you die. I mean if he comes tonight. Are you going to lift your head and be overjoyed because your redemption is here or are you going to faint with fear and foreboding?

[12 : 00] That's the question. That's the biggest question you can answer in your life. Jesus isn't mucking around. He knows the consequences for people who reject God and reject God and reject God until it's too late.

So if there are signs that are coming you might say. If there are going to be signs and everyone's going to see it, why don't we just wait for the signs? Perhaps I can wait for the signs to appear and then I can repent.

Then I can give my life to Jesus. Just in time I'll get in through the door before it's too late. Well, let's see. Let's see about that. Verse 29 to 31.

Then he told them a parable. Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.

So also when you see these things taking place you know that the kingdom of God is near. He's trying to tell us over and over again we're going to see it again before the end that his return is going to be imminent after these signs appear.

[13 : 13] Remember last week he said talking about the fall of Jerusalem he said there are going to be these signs the fall of Jerusalem is coming but the end will not come soon thereafter and we've seen that.

It's been 2,000 years he's still not here. Now he's telling us when you see these signs these cataclysmic universal signs the end is going to come right on the back of it.

just like when you see a tree sprouting forth leaves you know the summer is here so it'll be with his return. He's going to further confirm his imminent return verse 32 to 33 troubling couple of verses we'll talk about these.

He says truly I tell you this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away.

Can you see why this has been a troubling couple of verses for interpreters of the Bible? A lot of ink has been spilled. I'm going to talk about three ways that we can interpret this.

[14 : 25] The problem is obviously that he's talking to his disciples and he's saying this generation will not pass away before these things the return of Jesus the end of the world happens. Well there aren't any disciples around anymore.

It's been a couple of thousand years. He's still not here. What's going on? First view I want to look at is that he was just wrong. He was mistaken. He kind of ascended to heaven and then oh I thought I was going back straight away.

I'm not going okay so right it's going to be three thousand years. He kind of didn't know what was going to happen and so he made a mistake in talking to his disciples. That is a view that's held pretty widely actually that Jesus just didn't really know what he's talking about and so he got it wrong.

We're not going to go with that view for a few reasons. First of all we saw last week that Jesus is trustworthy when it comes to prophecy. He had supernatural knowledge from God about future events and he got the destruction of Jerusalem exactly right.

He got other prophecies exactly right. And so we can trust him on this one. He's not going to make a mistake. Second of all Christians believe that Jesus was God incarnate.

[15 : 42] God doesn't make mistakes. Third of all we believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. That God doesn't make mistakes, theological mistakes in his word.

word. We also believe that circumstantial evidence would tell us that if this happened the early Christians I'm sure would have got together, taken an eraser and just rubbed that little bit out because if they didn't that would be the most embarrassing couple of verses in the Bible wouldn't it?

So you get rid of that bit and you save yourself a lot of trouble. It's obvious that that wasn't their view in the early church that Jesus had made a mistake. So there's a couple of other options.

Another option is that he was talking about the fall of Jerusalem, that these disciples, this generation wouldn't pass away before the destruction of Jerusalem. So that sounds pretty good because that happened in 70 AD so they still would have been alive.

So that fits in that way but it doesn't fit because really he's speaking about, as we've said, his return, the coming of the kingdom of God, the end of the world in effect. And he told us last week that there is a distinction between the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

[16 : 59] So the third option is the right one I think. And this is the interpretation that Jesus was talking about the generation that will see these signs appearing in the heavens and in the seas.

This generation that will see those signs will not pass away before I return. He's again going to be talking about the imminence of his return. That's what he's been on about the whole way through. When you see the signs, it's not going to be a long time before I return.

When the generation that sees these signs sees them, some of them are going to faint, some of them are going to rejoice and they're not going to pass away before Jesus returns. If Jesus returns before we die, then we will never die.

We'll be taken with him to paradise, to heaven, to be with him forever. That's the one I think we should go with.

Write that down. Let's look at verse 34 to 35. He says, Be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life.

[18 : 10] And that day does not catch you unexpectedly like a trap. Again, he's talking about imminence of his return. It's going to be like a trap. It's going to catch you out if you're not careful.

That that day doesn't catch you unexpectedly like a trap, for it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. This might be the major point of the verse and it's kind of the title that we have tonight, that we need to be on our guard.

We need to be alert. We need to be prepared for when Jesus returns. He talks about three things that he doesn't want us to do as we wait for his return. First is dissipation.

Be on your guard against dissipation. He also says be on your guard against drunkenness and be on your guard against the worries of life. You're going to look at those each. Dissipation.

Dissipation is a word that means selfish, frivolous living. Be on your guard against selfish, frivolous living, spending your money, wasting your money, wasting your time.

[19 : 16] Don't throw your life away because Jesus could return at any time. You know, today we are such a consumeristic society, aren't we? We throw our money away on so many things only to throw them out next season or when the next model comes out.

If anything, the fire should have taught us that what we have is, like Wayne said, like a vapour. Even our very lives is a vapour that can be taken away at any time. To live in a selfish, frivolous way is to not acknowledge that Jesus is coming back, that we have an eternal life to spend with him.

Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, Jesus says. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Have an eternal perspective. He warns us against selfish, frivolous living.

He warns us also against drunkenness. I think this is code for general moral disregard in our life. You know, drunkenness and moral disregard, moral-less living, comes when we forget that eternity awaits us, that Jesus is coming back.

That's what happens when we forget about the fact that we have a resurrection to wait for. Remember what Paul said, St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, there were a bunch of guys in his church that were saying there's no resurrection, there's not going to be any bodily resurrection, there's not going to be any recreated heaven.

[20 : 59] And Paul said to them these words, he says, but if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. drunkenness, immoral behaviour is the result of believing that there is nothing after this life.

If there was no eternity to greet me when I die, I would live completely selfishly without any moral fibre in my being. We've seen that happen over the years with dictators who have no moral fibre.

Paul says if there's no resurrection aka if there's no return of Jesus let's eat and drink be merry for tomorrow we die who cares. Jesus warns us against drunkenness because it's a fruit of a lack of awareness of his imminent return.

[22 : 28] It's the same with the worries of life. The third thing he talks about. Be on your guard against being weighed down with the worries of life. So many of us are so consumed with this life, with our job, with our relationships, you know, promotion we want, the money we want, the new car we want, just you could name a million things that fill our minds and take our time and cause us stress and panic and anxiety.

Jesus says, that's an indication that you're not focused on heaven. You know, the happiest people in the world are the people who are completely living in light of eternity. They know that they're just visiting this earth, they're passing through.

Here they have no lasting city, they live for a city that is to come. And they're the happiest people in the world. The happiest people in the world are the people that focus the least on themselves.

And we've got this sickness today, and it's called an addiction to self-esteem and self-worth and self-assurance. And we're bombarded with messages that say we've got to look after ourselves.

It's all about personal development, promotions, climbing the corporate ladder, improving, ourselves, getting the life we've always wanted, and it causes stress and anxiety and sickness.

[24 : 03] And I know, by the way, that some people have legitimate cause to be anxious. Some people struggle with mental illnesses, and they're severely plagued with anxiety and depression, and I get that.

But for the most part, most of us are so bound up in ourselves, and that's why. we have this problem that Jesus warns us against, the worries of life. And again, the antidote to dissipation, to selfish living, to drunkenness and immoral living, to worries of life, anxiety, it's all living in light of Jesus' imminent return.

if you know that he's coming back, if you know that you've got an eternity with him stretching out before you, you're not going to worry so much about this stuff.

You're going to be on your guard. God's So we've finished with this verse from Jesus. I want you to take it as a warning and an encouragement and a reminder.

Verse 36, he says, be alert, be alert, at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.

[25 : 28] Be alert, keep praying, keep praying that you'll be able to escape dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life. Keep praying that when he comes you won't faint with terror, that you'll be assured of your salvation and you'll lift your head and welcome him.

Be alert, keep encouraging each other to walk in paths of righteousness in the way that Jesus wants you to walk. Be alert, stay on your guard.

It's a war, the Christian life is a war and if a whole army goes to sleep, if the watchmen go to sleep then everyone gets killed. So be on your guard, stay alert.

Don't think that because he hasn't come for the last 2000 years that he may not come tonight. Be alert, be on your guard.

I want to encourage you to incorporate that prayer into your prayer life. See, we get so bound up in our lives like I said that we start praying prayers that are all to do with ourselves and in the immediate future.

[26 : 43] Jesus wants us to pray with one eye on eternity. So why don't I do that for us now to finish? Father, thanks for this reminder that Jesus is coming.

Thanks for this reminder to be on our guard, to be alert. Father, I pray that we would encourage one another to stay close to you, to keep trusting in you so that we would have no cause for terror when you return.

We pray for those now who at this point, if you return right now, would be facing an eternity of conscious torment at your hands.

A terrible, terrible, eternal existence under your judgment and wrath. Father, we do not want that to happen to anyone. We pray for them, for their souls, that you would save them.

We pray for the people in this room who don't have faith in you, don't trust you, don't know what you did for them, or don't repent and ask for your forgiveness.

[28 : 10] Lord, bring them to yourself. Father, I pray that we would keep one eye firmly fixed on eternity and that we would strive and look forward to, like a kid looking forward to Christmas, the day when you will return, when our redemption finally arrives.

And we spend eternity with you and with each other in the new heavens and the new earth. I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.