

Matt 24:27-31

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] I'm just going to spend a few moments meditating on that passage. Today is the beginning of the church year. It's the first Sunday in Advent, and the season of Advent was created by the architects of...

Well, it wasn't created, it was adapted by the founders of the Anglican Church, who created a series of cycles through... a series of seasons through the year, shaping our year around the great gospel events to do with Jesus.

His birth, his death, his resurrection, his sending of the Holy Spirit, and his coming. And Advent just means coming.

But the surprise in the Book of Common Prayer, which I don't want you to take out right now, is that the focus of the readings and the prayers in this season of Advent is not just the first coming of Jesus at Christmas, it is his second coming.

And the idea through this season is that as we remember the first coming and prepare for Christmas, we do so in a way that prepares us for his second coming.

[1 : 15] And it's so important for us to dwell on the future coming of Jesus, or we'll be overwhelmed this season again by the tinsel and wrappings, and miss the urgency that the same baby born in the manger, who now rules in heaven with all the glory of God, is coming as saviour and judge to bring an end to this world.

And we are all forward-leaning creatures. Our souls and our hearts starve without hope.

You will remember the name perhaps of Viktor Frankl, who was a Jewish psychiatrist in Vienna before the Second World War, who worked hard to eliminate the suicide rates of young men around him in that despair between the wars, who worked hard to rescue the mentally disabled from as the Nazis took over.

And in 1942, he and all the members of his family were arrested and sent to concentration camps, separated, some were executed, some died of disease. And he survived Auschwitz.

And in 1946, he published his most famous book about hope and how hope deeply affects how we draw meaning from life.

[2 : 40] Hope affects how we live, how we suffer, in his view, even how long we live. And in the concentration camps, he personally witnessed the different reactions to extreme evil and suffering.

And for some, it was shock that led them into apathy and depersonalisation and bitterness and disillusionment. But there were those whose reaction was not just the result of the terrible conditions of their lives, but whose reaction was also measured by the hope that came from the future.

And he writes in that book, if you lose hope in those circumstances, you are doomed. And the same is true for us. If our hope is fragile or false, we are doomed.

And so the question for us this morning and for this season is, where does real hope come from?

The kind of hope that holds up in the face of extreme suffering.

The kind of hope that holds up in a world now of hyper-conflict and outrage, of wars and apocalyptic environmentalism. And I think this is a specially thorny issue for us as Christians because there's been a great deal of damage done teaching about the future from Christian teachers who swing on the pendulum from one extreme to the other.

[4 : 10] On one side, and this is more a contemporary temptation, we're frankly embarrassed with the second coming of Jesus and we're frightened of being seen as out of touch and irrelevant to the great issues of the day, peace and global warming.

John Stott said a number of years ago, and I quote, we will be regarded as nincompoops, which is an old word for a fool, like Noah who went on building an ark when the skies were blue and there

were no clouds in the sky.

That's one extreme. We never talk about it. We just avoid it. It's a bit embarrassing. Like that old uncle, the drunk uncle at the party. On the other side, the practice is to latch onto some obscure text from the Bible and then become really dogmatic and rigid and build a whole scary teaching system based on your own guesswork, ignoring the very clear teaching of Jesus and the scriptures on the second coming.

And some of you experienced that. And so we need to come to this area with humility. Not everything about Jesus' second coming is clear and revealed.

But in the New Testament, and Jesus himself speaks about the second coming, it's raised more than any other topic. There are over 300 references to the second coming of Jesus in the New Testament, which is a lot, when you consider there are only four to the Lord's Supper.

[5 : 37] Jesus said in John 14, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

So here are some things about the second coming of Jesus before we look hard at the passage, a bit harder. And I wasn't sure how many to give you, so I wanted to come up with a biblical number. I thought 144,000 might be... So I've gone with seven. Here are seven things about the second coming of Jesus. Firstly, his second coming will be personal.

I will come again. Or as the angels said at the ascension, this same Jesus who you saw ascend, he will come. To the same person who was born in poverty in Bethlehem, who lived and taught and died and rose and ascended, he will come again.

It's going to be a personal coming. Number two, it'll be a physical coming. So the word that Jesus chooses to use, which I'll talk a bit more about later, describes his bodily, physical presence.

[6 : 48] So on that day when he is revealed from heaven, it's not going to be a vision or an avatar or a virtual reality. He will come in his glorified eternal body.

Personal, physical, third, visible. You will see the Son of Man coming with great glory. Every eye shall see him, says the Bible, and it'll be accompanied by the sound of trumpets of angels.

Fourthly, it will be universal. Global, universal. Every single human being will see the Lord Jesus at the same moment.

So every single person will hear the trumpet. It will be worldwide. You don't need to worry. You won't miss it. Personal, physical, visible, universal.

Fifthly, it'll be sudden. Nobody knows the hour of his coming, despite the false claims of false teachers. It will be unexpected and take many by surprise.

[7 : 51] I should say on this, when I was at high school, I remember meeting a man who was standing on the street corner telling us that Jesus was going to come on Christmas Day that year.

And I was foolish and young enough to argue with him. I just thought I'd tell you that. I feel strongly about it.

Now, number six, Jesus' coming will be final. His coming in glory will bring an end to this world and an end to this age. And this creation will be dissolved and remade into the new heavens and the new earth.

And all evil will be finally, permanently removed and judged. And we will see the great vindication of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour glorified in his people.

And finally, it will be the completion of the work of Jesus Christ. Because the second coming is not really a new or different thing.

[8 : 55] It's the realisation. It's the revelation and application of all that he did at the cross. So there are seven things about the second coming.

I want you all to repeat after me. The personal, physical, visible, universal, sudden, final, and completion. So, one of the clearest sections in all the Gospels where Jesus himself speaks about this is Matthew 24 and 25.

And it is heart-stoppingly beautiful as Jesus speaks very plainly. And there is much here that will supernaturally nourish our souls with hope.

In the verses that Daryl read, Jesus teaches us two things about his future coming. The first is this. It will be the fulfilment of love.

Verse 30. It's impossible to adequately express the love of Jesus in this verse.

[10 : 21] that the same Son of Man who went to the cross will come for this reason, to gather his chosen ones. And if you were to look back in your Bible to the very last chapter, just a few verses

before this, at the end of chapter 23, Jesus is weeping over Jerusalem.

And you can hear his own pathos, even heartbreak, as he repeats the name of Jerusalem in verse 37, Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together? Same word. As a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you are not willing.

Twice Jesus speaks as though he is God himself. I would gather you, he says, but you would not. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus demonstrates such compassion and pity and kindness. And he says, as a mother hen, I long to gather you together to protect you from your own foolishness and from the fox. But they refused the way of grace, thinking that they had a better way. [11:46] This is what we've done since the Garden of Eden. We've run as fast and as far away from the arms of God as we possibly can until we find ourselves lost in fractured families and fractured cities and a fractured world.

But God continues his abundant mercy, his overflowing grace, to love us and provide for us and call us back to himself to gather us to himself.

He sends his Old Testament prophets to call them back to his love. Come to me, he says. But we keep thinking we are wiser and better than God.

We keep trying to create heaven on earth. And every time we try to create heaven on earth, we end up creating a kind of a hell on earth. We're so easily taken in by our own utopian dreams.

One of the things that amazes me is that John Lennon's song, Imagine, has become the unofficial sugary anthem at all public tragedies in the West. Imagine there's no heaven, no religion too, nothing to kill or die for.

[12:55] And the idea being that the problem in this world is people believing things too strongly, that we have the resources in ourselves to create peace on earth apart from religion. And it ignores the fact that the bloodiest wars, by far the most lives have been lost in secular wars and conflicts.

And the problem with this thinking, which is our thinking, is that we think God is like us, that God's mercy is somehow limited, that his compassion is constrained, that one day he's going to grow tired of us and hold it at a distance.

And that we cannot really wish, he cannot really wish to embrace us, and so we need to tidy ourselves up and make the world a bit better first. God's ways are not our ways.

He is abundant in steadfast love. He overflows with compassion and mercy. And when we hear his voice and when we return to him, it doesn't matter how ashamed or how disgusted we are with ourselves, he pardons.

And when he pardons, he doesn't do it reluctantly or grudgingly or coldly or half-heartedly. He not only accepts us and pardons us abundantly, but he sweeps us in his arms again and gathers us to himself.

[14:13] There's the word gather. And on the day when Jesus Christ returns, he's going to send out the angels with a trumpet blast, and we will finally hear the music of heaven.

And he'll gather his elect from every corner of the earth. No one will be missed and overlooked. And when he comes, it will be the fulfillment of his love.

He won't just deliver us from tribulation or suffering or difficulty. We will have the joy of being swept into his arms. That's why the church is unique.

It's not just going to survive wars or devastation or disobedience. It's going to thrive. And until Christ comes again, it will continue to attack the gates of hell, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And those who are gathered to him in that day are the one group who on this earth have unspeakably good news. We have news that transcends the boundaries of our world and our imagination.

[15:18] And this same Jesus who came from heaven in love, born in that squalid village of Bethlehem, who demonstrated his overflowing grace each day, who died for our forgiveness and rose again and offered us eternal life, this same one will come to fulfill his promise to take us to be with him.

That is the gospel of the kingdom. We have to hold the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus together because when he comes, it will be to complete the work of salvation, which means his second coming is not a standalone event.

It's not completely new. Let me put it this way. It's not the decisive victory when he comes again. That's already taken place in the cross and resurrection.

He triumphed over evil. He dealt with our sin. So as we draw near to the incarnation and the celebration of Christmas, we do rejoice together at the richness of his love, that he would leave his throne and enter our world for us.

But we look forward because if he never comes again, there is no real hope for us in suffering. If he never comes again, there's no power for us to forgive others, really.

[16:41] There's no urgency in our mission. We may as well just go to sleep spiritually. But the only adequate food to nourish our hope is that as we look back to his love, we look forward to the fulfillment of his love in the future as we abide in his love today.

That's the first point. The second coming of Jesus will be the fulfillment of his love. The second point more briefly. Jesus' second coming will be the revelation of his glory.

It's not going to be like his first coming. When he first came, it was quiet and humble and obscure. When he comes again, it will be dramatic, global and inescapable.

Let me remind you of verse 29 of Matthew 24. Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, the powers of heaven will be shaken.

Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man or the sign which is the Son of Man. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

[18:00] Jesus chooses a unique word to describe his second coming. It's the Greek word *parousia*. It's not the normal word for coming.

The English coming is a lame translation. It's used for when a royal person visits and when they're finally present, that is the *parousia*. So his coming, which is bodily, physical and real, will be the open display of what the angels can now see in heaven.

It's going to be the clear revealing of his splendor and glory and light which we can't see now. So when he comes again, it's not that something new happens to Jesus, it happens to us.

It's what's now hidden from our eyes will suddenly be revealed with dazzling weight and reality, which is why Paul describes Christian believers as those who long for his appearing.

And as the world finally comprehends and sees the true glory of the Son of God, Jesus tells us in the verses there's going to be three reactions. The first is mourning because every eye will see him and he says the tribes of the earth will mourn and wail.

[19:18] And the reason for their grief is that now they are in the presence of the great glory and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ and they'll get a glimpse of what they've missed out on by rejecting him. The same one who wept over them at Jerusalem will now be the cause of their weeping as they realize that the opportunity to open themselves to his grace has passed.

This is the clear teaching of Jesus in the scriptures. It will be too late to repent on that day. Instead, they face accountability as we all do toward him since he's been appointed as the judge of the living and the dead.

They will be separated from believers and that separation will be terrible and it will be complete and it will be irrevocable and it will be a fearful day for many.

Again, this is the plain teaching of Jesus. There's nothing complicated about it and that's why in his ministry Jesus' constant call is come, come, come to me all you are weary and heavy laden and we need to turn to him while we still have time.

So the first response to the revelation of his glorious morning the second response is shaking. His *parousia*, his coming again is not just about you and me it's about the whole creation and the cosmos.

[20:49] So when it talks about the sun being dark and the moon not giving light and the heavens being shaken it means this whole old creation which is somehow caught up in our sin and is subject to decay will not be able to bear the full weight of the glory of the Son of God and the coming of his glory will purify the old creation from all that is unclean and mortal.

And later in the New Testament the Apostle Peter reveals that the glory of Jesus when he comes will literally dissolve this present world. Not annihilate, not destroy but break down the creation into its basic substances and cleanse it from all evil and all injustice and remake the new heavens and the new earth which will be able to sustain righteousness where there will be no possibility of evil or

Satan or death or sin or disease or distress the perfect home for those who are gathered to him. the first reaction is mourning the second is shaking and the third is joy because when the when the Son of Man comes he will come with great glory and the glory is the active presence of God in goodness and steadfastness and abundant abundant mercy and when he comes in glory all those who trust in him will be transformed we will be transformed in heart and body and soul we will see him face to face we will see each other without shame without sin there will be no fear will be made like him he will be glorified in his people and this is the great purpose of his coming Paul says our citizenship is in heaven from it we await a saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body

Jesus has a special love for his people he will come to deal with evil but he comes as saviour and the same Lord who hears our prayers promises to keep us every step of the way and that the nothing can pluck us out of his hand until that day and the great salvation that he has begun in you he will bring to completion in that day in such a way that he'll receive the praise and you and I will receive the joy yeah and I tried hard to think of a way to apply this and I want to just take a New Testament application which is for us as a church community and it's this that there is no such thing as a lone Christian we cannot do this solo in the book of Hebrews the writer says this in the light of Jesus second coming let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near so here I want to offer to you an advent exercise we so naturally obsess about ourselves but the New Testament takes the second coming of Jesus and says here you are brothers and sisters here is your responsibility to each other agitate each other stir each other up to love and good works not just a good feeling of love and not just good works but the two together so here is the discipline to stimulate encourage each other in the light of the day of Christ and the writer says to do that we need to consider how to do it we need to think creatively about how to agitate each other in the light of his coming so for the next 30 days as we hear about the coming of our

Lord Jesus Christ both at Christmas and at the end let's give daily and creative thought as how we can stir up others around us to love and good works and then do it Amen so now and then we need to in the Kyat and let's ICU