

Matthew 24:27-31 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] Oh, good evening folks. If you are brand new, my name is Aaron. I look after this service. I would say come and say hi to me afterwards, but because I've got something that my kids gave me, I'm going to go home after I preach. So, but I really wanted to come and preach the sermon. So let me start off being quite candid. So when it comes to Christmas, this Christmas season, which in church land we call Advent, I think what we like to do is think about Jesus in a manger. Like baby Jesus in a manger, shepherds, we love that. It's fantastic. It's a great story and that's the one we tend to focus on because it's so profound.

God becomes one of us in great humility to save us. This is certainly one of the big themes of Advent. But as we heard from, you know, I don't know what's it, Captain Christmas earlier on with the kids there. It's not, it's not the only big theme of Advent, of course.

The other big theme is Christ will return. So Christ came as a baby and he'll return as a king. In fact, when the Anglicans were sort of putting together this whole thing, writing the prayers and organizing the calendar and the readings and stuff for this time of the year, the emphasis originally was more on the second coming than it was the first. So it's this we're going to focus on for this season of Advent. I think one of the reasons we decided to do that, specifically spend these weeks looking at this one big idea, is because we just don't talk about it that much now. So I became a Christian in 1987. And at that point, Christ's return was a much bigger deal. It was talked about more, it was preached on more, it was written about more. It seemed like it was just more part of the Christian cultural landscape. Christian pop culture was really into it. There was the whole Left Behind book series. I don't know if you guys remember this. 80 million copies sold. Christian singers were singing about it. There was a song by a guy called Larry Norman. Ring any bells? Larry Norman wrote a song. Here's a couple of lines from it. It's called, I Wish We'd All Been Ready. Remember this? I Wish We'd All Been

Ready. Two men walking up a hill. One disappears and one's left standing still. See that? You know what they say about David? The voice of an Australian angel. That's what they say.

The voice of an Australian angel. I'll carry on. There's no time to change your mind. This is still lyrics. There's no time to change your mind. The sun has come. You've been left behind. Oh man, it's a terrible image, isn't it? It used to freak me out. A man and wife asleep in bed.

[3 : 1 6] She hears a noise and turns her head. He's gone. I wish we'd all been ready. Now I found this terrifying when I was a kid. So this, but I will say this, this particular version of the end times where people suddenly disappear and everyone's wondering, oh what happened to those guys?

Is a theological innovation, there are better ways of thinking about it. I'll say that. And we'll get there shortly. My main point is though, as Christ's return was a really hot topic, it seemed for quite a few years, quite a long time. But for the last 20 as a doctrine, it seems to have fallen out of favor. And I think there's a number of reasons for this. I think, I'll just say one of them. One of them is that some Christians have wanted to nail down an exact time for Christ's return and have said some very silly things. And these are not terrible Christians.

They're faithful followers of Jesus who are just trying to make sense to the world. But in trying to, you know, connect the minutiae of geopolitics to specific verses in the Bible, in ways that don't, they're not really meant to relate. It sometimes has made Christians look crazy.

And I think that's one of the main reasons the secret of becoming is become like the embarrassing uncle of Christian theology. Or to put it another way, if you know anything about 1980s hip hop or the rap group Public Enemy, this doctrine has become the flavor-flav of systematic theology.

Thank you. Thank you. Did anyone else get that? Okay, so like four or five people got that. For the rest of you, that's really clever what I just said. That was really clever.

[5 : 09] Just make a note to myself here. Turns out the evening service is slightly more highbrow than I anticipated. So let me summarize so far. When it comes to Christ's second coming, people make one of two errors.

One of two mistakes. First is taking passages out of context and saying silly things, which has been the habit of Christians for 100 years. We take beautiful ideas, we take our best ideas, and we turn them into something weird. That's the first mistake. The second mistake, the second error we make, is we ignore the second coming. It becomes an embarrassment to us.

That's a terrible mistake to make as well. So I hope this Advent season that we can furnish your imagination with this doctrine, refurnish it with this doctrine. I hope it gains a prominent place in your life and your spiritual journey, because it's essential to our faith. The fact that Christ will return one day, at any moment, should sober us, it should change us, it should shape our decisions.

Folks, if this great hope is not at the center of how we live, it's not a... You don't have a Christian hope in your life, you have some other hope. Anyway, that's all that to say, for Advent, we're looking at the return of Christ.

The Greek word for this, there's a number of words, but a common one is the word *parousia*. So when you hear that word in a sermon, that's what I'm talking about, *parousia*. Okay, after that rather bloated introduction, let's head to the passage, my friends.

[6 : 49] It's a short one, Matthew 24, 27 to 31. I think the message is pretty simple. I'm not going to try and complicate it. Let's jump into verse 28, because I think that's really interesting.

Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. There's not a consensus on this, to be honest, about what this means.

I think... What I came down to this week is that it's referring to an ancient proverb, it's probably proverbial. If you see vultures in the sky, circling, you know there's a corpse below, you can't miss it.

And I think that's the first point. You're not going to miss Jesus' return. That's the thing that Jesus is saying to us. You're not going to miss me. You're not going to miss it when I come back. Verse 27, for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

You don't miss a lightning strike that fills the sky. You won't miss Christ's return. It won't happen in secret. Christ is not going to come back quietly and squirrel away his people and then nip off back to heaven and leave a whole lot of people wondering, Oh, what happened to Larry?

[8 : 07] He didn't turn up for work. He didn't turn up for work on Monday. It's not how it's going to happen. This will be a cosmic event. Verse 29, the sun will be darkened. The moon will not give its light.

And the stars will fall from heaven. And the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Everyone will see this. Everyone. Christians will see it. The atheists will see it.

The despots will see it. Nuns are going to see it. Tribes people will see it. It will be universal. It will be unavoidable. There are a couple of Christian broadcasters.

It's a true story. A couple of Christian broadcasters who have purchased property in Jerusalem. And they have live webcams pointing straight at the Mount of Olives where Christ preached these words.

They've done that because they don't want to miss the moment when Jesus returns. Folks. It's probably unnecessary. Right?

[9 : 01] Given what Christ has just told us. Again, I'm not making fun of these people. It's just that it's, oh, we turn beautiful things into wacky things sometimes.

The parousia will not be like Christ's first arrival. It won't be obscure and local in a small town in the middle of nowhere. We won't have to search for him.

Like the wise men of the shepherds. He's going to come for us. He'll be looking for us. Now look at verse 30 there again. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man.

Will appear the sign of the Son of Man. Okay, what's that sign? It's a good question, right? What's that sign? Well, this is the answer to the big question the disciples asked right at the beginning of Matthew 24.

They asked, what are the signs of your return? And Jesus says in the whole paragraph there goes, wars and persecutions and dramas. Which is just kind of like what we've experienced for 2,000 years, isn't it?

[10 : 03] See, what they're wanting is they're wanting the five minute warning bell. Jesus, what's the five minute warning bell? When are we in overtime? When are we in extra time?

It's not going to be there. There's no five minute warning bell. Everything he said that's going to happen has happened. Except that he's actually returned. Does that make sense?

The sign of the Son of Man in the passage is what? It's the man. The only thing to tell you who's coming back is that he's going to come back.

The sign of his return is actually him returning. It's foolish to look for specific signs. Read too much into that stuff. We should be very suspicious of people who say, well, this is happening in the Ukraine and this is happening there.

So it's pretty close. Jesus himself was very suspicious of people who read too much into things like that. I'm still on my first point here. So the perusia, right?

[11 : 03] It will be unmissable. It's going to be unmistakable. It's going to be cosmic. It's going to be sudden. You can't predict it. And that's okay because you won't be able to miss it either.

That's the first point. We're also told that it will be personal. It will be personal.

It will be a personal return. Verse 30 says, we will all see the Son of Man. We'll see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

So at the end time, Jesus won't send an avatar. He's not going to send just a message. It's not going to be just good vibes or representative. He will come himself. Jesus will personally return.

He's not going to just sign off the end of time and something crazy will happen. He will personally return. 1 John chapter 3 says that when Christ returns, we shall see him as he is.

[12 : 12] Isn't that wonderful? My kids are really into Michael Jackson at the moment, especially my son, Ollie. And it blew their mind when I told them I had seen Michael Jackson live in concert.

Also seen ZZ Top, which I thought was pretty cool. Excellent. Michael Jackson. Michael Jackson, that was awesome. In real life, we were in the same space together.

It was right there, like, you know, 50 feet from me. Like that, we will see Jesus in the flesh. Jesus who was born in humility, who slept in a feeding trough, who died this cursed death.

He will return personally in a cloud of glory. The kindest, the kindest, truest person who's ever lived.

The kindest, truest person who's ever lived. He will come again. He will come again and we will see him. We will see him as he is. That's the second point. Again, these are really simple ideas.

[13 : 20] I'm just, I'm trying not to ruin the poignancy of them by riffing theologically too much on them. But, look, here's what we've said so far. The parousia. You can't miss it.

It's going to be universal, unmistakable, unpredictable, and it will be personal. But, lastly, the passage also tells us what it's going to mean for the world.

And it says two things about what it means for us. It says there will be mourning and there will be gathering. Mourning, in verse 30 there, it talks about this.

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn. When Jesus returns as king and judge, many people will realize that, you know, they've built their life on sand.

And, you know, this is not a, you know, like a popular thing to talk about. And if it makes you feel uncomfortable, I just want to remind you that, you know, it's always been one of the great lies or the evil one, that there's no calling to account.

[14 : 28] You may remember this from Genesis, that, you know, the first lie to humanity in the garden was a denial of judgment. And the serpent said to Adam and Eve, ah, surely you will not die.

So, for the world, for many, there will be mourning and there will be grief. But there will also be a glorious gathering.

Verse 31. Jesus' appearance will be unimaginable joy for his people.

And not a single Christian on the planet will be left out. His angels will gather us from every corner of the earth.

Christians in parliament. Christians in prison. Christians in preschool. Christians living on the streets. Christians in castles and palaces.

[15 : 35] Christians in Christian. Not one of God's people will be missing. All of his people will be brought to him. The Bible speaks about this in lots of different ways.

It says it will be as joyful as a groom seeing his bride for the first time on the wedding day. In other places it talks about, it said it's going to be like the beginning of an incredible feast, like a banquet.

Here, Jesus is referencing something he said back in chapter 23. And he said to his disciples, how often have I desired to gather your people together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.

That gather word, that's the same word. Jesus here, like a mother. Like a mother. Gathering her children under protective wings. That's what Jesus will do for us. Isn't that wonderful?

Let me finish here. What a hope we have, eh? What a hope we have. This is the kind of hope that can outshine any darkness in our life.

[16 : 50] Viktor Frankl was a Holocaust survivor. He was a psychiatrist. And when he was put in the concentration camps, even though he was a prisoner, he still had the mind of a scientist. So he was studying the folks around him, what they were going through.

He wanted to see what happened to people's psyches under enormous stress. And after the war, he wrote a book called Man's Search for Meaning.

He tried to unpack the different responses that people had. He says the prisoners like him tended to react in four different ways. Some of them became brutal.

Some of them quite quickly just gave up all hope. He writes this in his book. The prisoner who had lost his hope in the future is doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold.

He let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly in the form of a crisis. Usually it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed, to wash, or go out to the parade grounds.

[17 : 55] No blows, no threats had any effect. He'd just lie. He'd just lay there hardly moving. He simply gave up. He said other prisoners held on. They got through it by thinking, I'll get my old life back soon, all my hopes and dreams.

But Frankl followed up with some of these people and he found often their lives fell apart afterwards. Because there was nothing on earth. There's no earthly joy to compensate for what they went through.

But there was a group, a small group, who stayed kind. Not necessarily happy, but they had a buoyancy about them. Some inner strength sustained them.

They had some kind of hope that the pain couldn't destroy. And I think it's here that Frankl is very helpful to us. At getting at the importance of hope.

Because there's no way to get through life without it. But it can't just be any hope. It can't be a hope, I hope I get married, I hope I have kids, or I hope I'm happily single, or I hope I have...

[19 : 00] It can't just be any hope. That's the key. Folks, the Jesus who said he would die and rise again, he kept that promise.

That same Jesus says he will return and we won't miss it. And he says he will gather us and he will wipe away all our tears. And he will make all things right.

Folks, that's a hope. You don't have a better one than this. Well, these words are a treasure, aren't they?

Folks, I hope we will continue to furnish your imagination with them. This Advent. Amen. Amen.

Yeah. Okay. See you later. COVID-19.