

Be prepared

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Preacher: Chris Jones

[0 : 00] Leave your Bibles open where Amish just read to us. And I'm going to pray.

Lord Jesus, as we come to your word and as we think again about your coming again, open our hearts to you and help us to live our lives in the light of your coming and to see what your coming means for those who are safe in you.

Great joy, great security and help us to rejoice in what we see in here tonight. In Jesus' name, Amen. I had a pretty low day the other day.

I had a moment where I was desperately in need of God's wisdom and I think also wanting a sense of his nearness and his care.

You know, you hit a low spot, you almost want to feel God's there as well as know God's there. And I went to a quiet spot. In fact, I went up to the foyer at church. Nobody was around.

[0 : 59] And I sat there to pray. And the best I was able to do was pray, Lord, please give me wisdom and love. That was about as big as the prayer got.

I needed God's presence. I couldn't feel it. And then I phoned a friend. And he was wisdom in the flesh for me.

I don't know how I really expected God to answer my prayer, but I tell you that he did it in a way that was really simple. He answered it in the person of my friend, whom I call wisdom personified.

In fact, my wife knows who this man is because I said to her, I prayed to God and then I rang wisdom personified and she knew exactly who I rang. And in that moment, I take my friendship with my friend as God's blessing to me.

I was reassured about the presence and the protection and the purposes of God in the person of my friend. Life this side of heaven is sometimes very difficult.

[2 : 11] And I guess when I talk to church family even tonight, each of us are walking in a different place and a different moment and experiencing different things.

So some of us will be sitting here thinking, it's pretty cool at the moment, it's pretty great and it's coming up to Christmas and I'm going to get all the things I wanted. And that's for you. But there may be another one or two amongst us who are really struggling at the moment for whatever reason.

And when life is difficult, I think that's when we really want to pray the last words of the Bible, which are, come Lord Jesus, come. Come back again, please Lord Jesus and wrap this whole show up because it's just not that cool being here at the moment.

I want to say tonight that the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is an essential part of Christian understanding and it helps us to wait and make sense of the very imperfect world which we're living in at the moment.

I'm preaching this short series on Jesus coming, the return of the Lord Jesus. I spoke about it last week and went to three passages, a few different passages, some in John's Gospel, some in 1 Thessalonians and some in Acts chapter 1.

[3 : 28] And I said that Christians believe very distinctive things about life after death. We believe in the resurrection of all people. We don't believe in reincarnation.

We don't believe in endless cycles of life. We don't believe that you can come back as a flea on a dog's bottom. And we don't believe in annihilation, back to dust with no further consequences.

We believe that people cannot escape the ultimate justice of God by dying out of this world. And we believe in the resurrection to face the judgment of God and of ultimate accountability.

We believe in the justice of God which does not allow us to escape responsibility. And we believe in the mercy of God in the Lord Jesus Christ which allows us to stand safe at his judgment.

We do not have to fear the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So Jesus' second coming from a Bible point of view, it is certain, it will be sudden, it will be seen by all, it will happen when his father says it will happen.

[4 : 33] Nobody can predict the moment. So when somebody tries to, somebody puts a date on the coming of Jesus, somebody says you can be slow, it's not coming yet, or it's going to happen next year on such and such a date, I want you as Christian people, as my brothers and sisters to be able to just say straight out rubbish.

It's nonsense. Even if it's the most well-meaning and well-intentioned person. What do I say to them? Rubbish. Because the scripture says otherwise. All people will be raised to face the judgment of God.

Jesus' coming will mean that judgment and destruction for those people who have rejected him, but joy for everyone who trusts and hopes in him. So to have your name written in the Lamb's book of life means that you will be safe on the day of his coming.

I'm particularly preaching tonight about Matthew chapter 25, verses 1 to 13. Jesus tells a story about 10 virgins waiting to meet a bridegroom and to escort him to collect his bride.

That doesn't sound very good, does it? I think the virgins are the bridesmaids and they're waiting for the groom to come and to collect his bride. I've preached this passage before and I was going to preach it, not I haven't preached it here, I've preached it in another place, and I was going to preach it unchanged for the night and I got it out and I thought, oh, this is easy, easy work of preparation, I've done this before and as I started to read over the work that I'd done before, I realised I'd done a really lousy job last time and I hadn't understood the passage properly and all of a sudden I had a workload which I didn't expect and I want to say to you tonight that I think I've learnt some things, I think I've got better in understanding the passage but I don't think I've got it perfect, so if you're sitting there reading the passage while I'm speaking to you tonight and you see some things in it and you go, aha, tell me about it afterwards because we don't see everything every time we get up to speak.

[6 : 26] You can't understand this passage without understanding Matthew chapter 24 which is immediately before it and Matthew 24 is a notoriously difficult chapter of the Bible to understand.

So the people of the first century, the people that this was written to were like some of us, they were living at a time when God hadn't spoken for a long time, maybe 500 years since one of the prophets had spoken.

There hadn't been a word of God for a long time and there was this growing expectancy that God was going to turn up and show his face. Some people were expecting the coming of the Messiah, the King and they associated his coming with the end of time, one coming, one end.

So when the Messiah comes, that'll be the end, it's all wrapped up. We're a bit the same. We're looking for one more coming of Jesus and we associate his coming when he comes again with the wrapping up of history as we know it, the end of the world, one more coming, one end.

Jesus lived in revolutionary times. You find this out when you read the New Testament. People were anticipating a king who would lead them to glory, who would reestablish the kingdom of David with all its magnificence for a thousand years before.

[8 : 02] A king who would drive the pagan Romans out of the land of God's promise and there were false Christs in Jesus' day who were going to lead God's people to glory.

You can read about them in the New Testament. Two of them are mentioned in Acts chapter 5. They were Jewish revolutionaries. Their names were Thutis and Judas, not Judas who was Jesus' disciple but another Judas.

And both these men led uprisings of several hundred men against the Romans and these movements collapsed when their leaders were killed. So kill the leader, the movement collapses. Jesus was executed in an environment where he was seen to be a threat to national security.

He died and the movement around him didn't collapse, it grew. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, the Jewish leadership whipped up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas.

Set Barabbas free. Don't set Jesus free. Set Barabbas free. We want him. And Barabbas was a murderous insurrectionist. When Jesus was arrested, Peter drew his sword straight away, didn't hesitate and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant.

[9 : 18] Great stroke. Magic to see. Because he was expecting to have to swing his sword in following his king, Jesus.

These were all people who were expecting to use weapons to help God achieve his purposes. They had preconceived ideas about what the coming of the Messiah would look like.

And that's why so many of them had no idea that it was even happening when it was actually happening because they had such another idea in their head about what would happen. even Peter.

And what you see here is that God is very active in his work in a way that they cannot see and is not yet understood. So Matthew 24 begins with Jesus saying, well, it's all over for the temple and it's all over for Jerusalem.

The disciples are with Jesus. They're travelling. They're marvelling at the cityscape. I did it yesterday. We went, by the grace of some of our friends here, we went and saw the Messiah in the Sydney Opera House yesterday afternoon, Kerry and I, with a few of you.

[10:27] Who else went? Look at the hands going. It was the Foo Club. The Foo Fan Club because we were supporting Chrissie Fulcher who was singing in the chorus.

And, you know, the city skyline is pretty magnificent, isn't it? You can sit on the northern side of the harbour and you look across the city, you see the Opera House, it's silhouetted by the bridge down this side and the high-rise buildings on the other side and you can go sometimes, oh, wow, isn't it awesome?

And that's what these guys did outside Jerusalem. They're travelling with Jesus, they're looking back at Jerusalem, they're seeing the walls and the temple and the other buildings out there and they're saying, it's awesome, Jesus.

And Jesus says, it's up for demolition. It's all coming down. And in AD 67, the Roman army came in and totaled the city.

And 600 years later, Muslims built a mosque on the site, the third holiest shrine in Islam and it's been the most contentious piece of real estate in the world ever since.

[11:37] A temple hasn't been rebuilt. Why wasn't a temple rebuilt? Why doesn't a temple need to be rebuilt? Help me out. Help me out. God is everywhere.

We are the temple of the living God. So why do we need a temple rebuilt to sacrifice animals over and over again to God in worship of him when we have had the one true sacrifice for sin that Romans describes in the person of the Lord Jesus step onto the stage of the world history?

So Christians who want to bring a temple back, we need to be able to say to them, rubbish as well. There's two rubbishes tonight. If you go to the chapter before, Matthew chapter 23, Jesus actually brings the curtain down on the whole of the Old Testament.

He says these words, O Jerusalem, 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 as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not. Your house is left to you desolate for I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[13:02] Jesus has told parables about the rejection of God's messengers and ultimately God's son and a new age is coming and a new dawn is about to begin and so in chapter 24 verse 3, he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately and they said, tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?

So you get information here, you see that Jesus is alone with his disciples, he's teaching them privately, this private teaching goes on through the whole of chapter 24 and the whole of chapter 25 and his close friends, his disciples, his followers have got two really big questions, when and what? When will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? How will we know that it's about to happen so that we can see it coming and be warned? They have this mindset that the coming of Jesus means the close of the age, for them the end of history is upon them and they want to be ready for it.

And the first question has an easy answer, chapter 24 verse 36, concerning that, this is Jesus speaking, concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the son but the father only.

Only the father of God in heaven knows when this is going to happen, not even me. And then in verse 44, therefore you must be ready because the son of man is coming at an hour when you do not expect.

[14:47] And so the easy answer is be ready. My father is the only person who knows the timing, it will be sudden, it will be unexpected and if anybody else has got a suggestion about the timing, just

forget it. They don't know.

But the second question is much harder. It's a really good question but they're asking it with wrong expectations. They don't yet understand that Jesus will come twice.

All the end time expectations which they're expecting to happen right now aren't going to happen just right now, they're going to be spread over time. Not everything's going to be completed with Jesus' first coming.

It's a brand new idea and it's never been on their radar before that Jesus might come once and then he might come again or the Messiah, the King might come once and then he might come again. And so Jesus tells them things about the destruction of the temple, many false Christs, wars, famines, persecution of believers to death, sun, moon and stars not giving light, the abomination of desolation standing in the temple.

And in verses 34 and 35 he says, I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

[16:08] And he's saying that there are events of cosmic consequence in the life and times of the current generation. You're living in them at the moment to the people back there 2,000 years ago.

They're happening with this current visit of God to his world and in the person of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. You have to move past Christmas. Christmas is nothing compared with what Christ is about to do.

It's a great time of the year but in terms of what Christ is about to do, it's what he's come to do and who he is which is really important. We move beyond the baby story to the glory of Christ and the kingship which he's going to exercise and he's particularly going to exercise that cross, that, that, his kingship on a hill outside of Jerusalem when he gives his life for the sins of anybody who would trust in him and when God vindicates him by raising him from the dead.

And the Bible says that this is a climactic event with cosmic consequences. What Jesus is doing back there has implications for the whole of history.

That's how big this event is. I think when Jesus died on the cross that was the abomination that causes desolation. There is nothing that has happened in the whole of human history which is as gross as what happened to Jesus on the cross.

[17:30] Because we, the people that God has made, even the religious leaders of his own time, the people who were supposed to protect religion and the temple and keep it holy and all those things seized God himself with their own hands and tried to destroy him as ridiculous as that is.

That is an abomination. So Jesus is also preparing them for an intervening period and another coming.

In chapter 24, verses 39 to 44, he says, 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.

If the thief had made an appointment, the owner of the house wouldn't have got caught out. So you also must be ready because the Son of God will come at an hour when you don't expect him.

God's not going to make an appointment for you to look forward to. There will be another coming.

There will be a delay between the two and that is where the story of the wedding in chapter 25 comes in.

[18:49] Ten virgins took their lamps and they went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.

The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. Bridegroom was a long time in coming and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

So Jesus tells this story. There's a wedding. No, I can't say what I want to say.

And you hear nothing about the bride in this wedding. It's bridegroom focused. It's man-centric. It's man-centric. The man spends the money.

The man makes the arrangements. I'm a dad and I've got one married son, one unmarried son and I've also got three unmarried daughters.

[20:02] So I like this passage because I think it's great for the man's family to bear the cost of the marriage and I think dowries are especially encouraged and I know I'm right because I talked to my boss this morning and he totally agrees with me.

So in Jesus' day, marriage was like this three-stage process. You'd get engaged. There was engagement, there was betrothal and then there was marriage and the story Jesus tells is about the

third stage where the bridegroom returns from his dad's place to take his bride. He's been building and what he's been doing, he's been at his dad's house building on an additional room that he can bring his bride to to begin their married life together. So he will come as soon as the building's completed, he will come at that moment with his entourage to get his bride and take her to his house to consummate the marriage and to live in their new home.

It's a great moment. It's a moment that they've been anticipating together for some time. Really interesting, Jesus uses similar language and imagery in John chapter 14 when he said, in my father's house are many rooms and I am going there to prepare a place for you.

[21 : 35] And he also said, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am. I'm going away, there are going to be rooms for my followers, I will return and we will journey to the place where I am.

So these ten young women are going to light the way for the groom when he arrives and they will go with him to the wedding banquet. Five are described as foolish, five are wise, all of them have lamps, the lamps are not the little thing they carry around a house, they're probably long sticks with a rag on the end soaked in oil that creates a blazing light outside as you travel through the night. Five are called wise because they have jars of oil, five are called foolish because they don't. They all look the same while they're waiting, they don't look any different, there's no difference except the oil.

The bridegroom's delayed, he takes a long time, he doesn't come as quickly as they had expected him to come, everybody gets the nods and they go to sleep. And it's really interesting because there's no judgment in this passage about them going to sleep, it's not as though going to sleep was a wrong thing for them to do, they all go to sleep.

But what Jesus is preparing them for is a delayed return, that's a new thought. It may well be an unexpectedly long time into the future and for people like us we can see that, we can look back, we can say, well it's been 2,000 years already, of course it was going to be a long time into the future.

[23 : 19] But it doesn't take faith for us to see that, we just look and see. But we do need faith to know that Jesus is still coming. It was probably very difficult for Jesus' disciples to come to terms with a slow return because they just thought it was going to be imminent.

You know, this same Jesus that you've seen going to heaven, he's going to return again in the same way that you've seen him going to heaven, said the angel. And they thought it was going to be in their own lifetime. But it shouldn't fill us with a, or lull us into a false sense of security either. One of, when I was in country town in New South Wales ministering, one of my precious 90 year old ladies who was full of faith and she'd walked through some hard yards in her life and God had been really gracious with her so I really respected her.

but she said to me one day, she said, I don't think Jesus will return yet because I don't think all the prophecies have been fulfilled yet. She was trying to be scriptural but she was limiting God with her theology.

And I lovingly disagreed and reminded her that Jesus teaches us to be at the ready. I don't think I changed her mind by the way but we differed and it was okay.

[24 : 43] And when you think about readiness I think there's two ways of understanding or thinking about readiness. There's a right way and there's a wrong way. So the wrong way is the story I told in my message last week about the deputy principal at Frenchess Forest High School who resigned his job in 1981 absolutely convinced that Jesus would return in 1982.

I'm not sure what he did after 1982. And I was thinking about this because I thought if I knew Jesus was coming back in four weeks time I'm going to stop putting money into superannuation straight away and I'm going to start spending it.

I'm not going to do any work. I said that to Steve this morning. No work. Sorry Deb. You have to do it all. You do it all anyway. That's probably what you're going to say. I'd be with my family and I'd probably be pleading with any members of my family to prepare to meet Christ.

That would be important for me just because I know and love the Lord Jesus. But if I was in the country I wouldn't bother planting any more crops. Wouldn't even bother harvesting them because there'd be no one to sell to in four weeks time.

People who aren't Christians I think would go into a frantic indulgent panic if they thought it was true if the world was going to end in four weeks time. I think you'd go and load up your credit card knowing that you'd never have any bank fees again never have to pay it back.

[26 : 12] I think life would be turned on its head. We'd become totally irresponsible and selfish. We'd go out there and live and do whatever we wanted to do without regard to the consequences. The routines of life would be shot to pieces.

Nobody would be serving one another. That's the wrong type of readiness and when somebody preaches to us that you've just got to be ever ready as though he's going to walk in the door tonight well yes that's right but no in terms of panic.

So what is the right way? Well I think you see it in the remainder of the story. The moment of truth arrives verse 6 at midnight the cry rang out here's the bridegroom come out to meet him and all the virgins woke and they trimmed their lamps and the bridegroom's return catches everyone by surprise the wise and the foolish everybody's caught up in the surprise of his return.

They all have to wake up to meet him. He turns up in the dead of the night when all the women are asleep. Everyone needs to do the normal things including sleep so it's all right to sleep but now there is a problem because the difference between the two groups becomes immediately obvious with the coming of the groom.

Some are ready to meet him and some aren't. And the foolish ones in a panic say to the wives give us some of your oil our lamps are going out. No they replied there mightn't be enough for both of us and you you get down the shop really quickly and go to the cellars of oil wake them up and buy some for yourselves.

[27 : 40] And while they were on their way to buy some oil the bridegroom arrived the virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet and the door was shut. it's a hard word and if you're like me you sort of you ask all sorts of questions when you're trying to prepare a message and figure out what's going on here but you know couldn't they have shared?

But you've got to look beyond the parable to see that this is a decisive moment of truth. There just isn't enough for everyone. It is the moment when preparedness is going to be seen in a final and an unchangeable way.

When Jesus returns it will be too late to decide to get ready. The opportunity will be in the past. You can't rely on another person's preparedness.

You might live in a family where one partner knows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ or maybe your mum or your dad do and they are well prepared for the return of Christ.

They know him and he knows them. And they don't have to fear the day and on that day you won't be able to say my partner did all the church going for our family.

[28 : 56] Or don't you see the fine Christian kids that I've raised or my family goes back three or four generations, believers, we've been saying grace for the last hundred years in our family.

family. Or the really hard one from a parent point of view is take my faith, take my oil and give it to my children, please save them instead of me.

That doesn't work either. We have to answer for ourselves. Do we have any oil?

Have we prepared? It's about you and whether you have prepared for that day. Will you go in with the groom or will the door be shut in your face?

And I know as I speak tonight that there may be some people here who know that what I'm saying about Christ and his return is true.

[30 : 05] You also know that you are unprepared to face him. You may know lots of true things about the Bible especially because you hang around churches and churches are a great place to hang around so no discouragement of that.

Even if you don't believe this is a wonderful place to be. You may know that Jesus died. You may know that Jesus was raised. You may know that Jesus is king in heaven right now.

You may know some great theology and you may have read some great Christian books. But to know about Jesus is different from knowing Jesus and loving Jesus.

Need both. people who know and trust the Lord Jesus will be well prepared to meet him when he comes.

We don't have to be afraid. He has prepared us for his coming by taking our sin and nailing it to the cross. And we have already entrusted ourselves to him in response to what he has done for us.

[31 : 12] We will be safe when he returns by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Story goes on and almost comes to a conclusion in verse 11.

Others came to him. Sir, sir, they said, open the door. The others, the others, that's the foolish ones, came to him and said, sir, sir, open the door for us. And he replied, I tell you the truth, I don't

know you.

I don't know you. And then Jesus says, therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour. See, the rejection for the unprepared is dreadfully clear.

It's too late. There is no reversal. Rejection is final. And I think at the very heart of this story are the words at the end of the story which are, I don't know you.

The wise ones are known by the groom and the foolish ones aren't. I said this morning, nobody invites guests to a wedding whom they don't know.

[32 : 30] Well, one of our mums contradicted me, but there you go. It's the gardener wedding next week and they've got 250 people coming. I don't think they know them all. But take the principle.

You don't get invited if you're not known. So being ready for Jesus' coming does not mean frantic panic, really important. It means knowing the Saviour now.

It means being on about his business. I'm going to come to that next week. Chapter 24, verse 44 says, you must also be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom the Master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them the food at the proper time? The Master has given him a job to do. Who's the faithful servant?

It will be good for that servant whose Master finds him doing what he's supposed to be doing when he returns. So when Jesus returns, people will see what they are missing out on and they will want it.

[33 : 38] But it will be too late. When Jesus returns, there won't be anybody having a peek at how good it is and saying, I don't want any of that. We'll all want in.

And those who reject Christ now face a future of grieving what they have missed out on. But the call throughout the Bible is to a life of faith now.

Faith which has impact on how we live now. Faith which is driving us to want to know Christ now.

Faith which leads us to hope in Christ now. Faith which is hungry for the righteousness of Christ now.

Faith which leads us to bow our knee to Jesus and to give way to him now. Faith which puts all our hope and trust in Jesus now.

It's a verse in Acts, isn't it? Today is the day of salvation. Knowing the groom now is what will keep us safe then.

[34 : 46] So, and that makes us safe right now, even tonight, to pray, come Lord Jesus come. And we can only pray that safely now because we know that we will be safe then.

Amen. that you will take who lives with Christ. You father and how you