

The Kingdom of God part 7

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 19th Aug 2012

Intro-

In previous sessions we have spoken about the kingdom of God:

- Being set to become the greatest of all Kingdoms.
- Being 'at hand'.
- Being seen in deliverance, healing, signs and wonders and in Good News being preached to the Poor.
- In this last part, part 7 we will look at the ultimate realisation of the Kingdom- the return of the King! We will look at the answers to four questions- when is the King returning, what are the signs, how is He returning, and why is He returning.

Read Mt 24:1-44

When is the King returning?- 'no one knows'-v36

- Look at 24:3. Jesus' disciples were wanting to know when He was to return. However, they ask not just one question but two or possibly three. When will these things be (i.e. the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem)? What will be the sign of your coming? When will be the end of the age?
- Christians differ on the last 2 questions, but the first question had a fulfilment in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple and we should bear this in mind when we look at Jesus' answers to these 3 questions. It would seem as if the horrific events which happened in AD 70 were an indication of how things will look at the end and so Jesus answers all three questions as if they were one.
- There is something about us as humans in that we are fascinated by the question 'when is the end going to come?'
- Christians and cults through the ages from the early Church onwards have tried to set a date for the end of the world and Christ's return, usually related to the time in which they were living:

In 1890 the Christian Herald (circulating to .25 million people at the time) suggested the year 1900 was the latest possible date for the consummation of the age.

In 1974 Hal Lindsey in 'The Late Great Planet Earth', a book very popular amongst Christians at the time, on page 43 suggested 1988 could be the date Jesus would return.

The Jehovah's Witnesses in 1889 said that 1914 would be the return of Christ. When that didn't happen they, in 1918, said that 1925 would mark the resurrection of the dead. When it didn't happen, in 1968 the return of Christ was predicted as 1975*.

Certain years spark the imagination- turn of the century- such as the year 2000, with the much feared 'Millenium bug'. Lately it is the year 2012 which has concerned many, hence the feature film by the same title.

- So, what does this passage have to tell us about the date Jesus will return, as this is part of the disciples question in 24:3? Jesus replied in 24:36 that no one knows when He will return, not even the angels, only the Father knows. Why did Jesus tell us this? So that we should not try to set a date on it as some have done and failed. We should believe Christ or we are opening ourselves up to error and deception.

What are the signs He is about to return?

- Although Jesus did not give a date as to His return He did however want to answer their question as to what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age.

He said there would be a number of signs and we should learn to read them, just like reading the signs in nature to determine the seasons (in v32 summer is known to be close by the sign of the fig tree branches becoming tender and putting forth leaves). If it's important to recognise the season of summer approaching how much more important it is to recognise the end of the world approaching? So what are these signs that Jesus gave?

- **Deception- v4-5, 11, 23-26**
- Jesus tells us this sign to protect us from deception- a bit like a warning about counterfeit money going around/bogus callers/email cons. Once informed you are on the lookout for it.
- False Christs appearing- Matt 24:4-5, 11, 23-26
- Man who went into a meeting and said 'I am God'.
- False prophets, cults, new age, false religions. Increase in counterfeit signs & wonders- Mt 24:24; Rev 13:13-14; Rev 16:13-14; 2Thess 2:9-10- check out the teaching and philosophy behind the healing- not all healing is by God's power- e.g. Spiritualism, acupuncture, rikeh healing etc.
- Anti ('against', 'opposite', 'in place of') Christs- deny deity and manhood of Christ either subtly or in outright rebellion- 1John 2:18-23; 1John 4:1-6; 2John v7. Empties cross of power if Jesus is not man and God. Antichrists:

Antiochus Epiphanes IV (called himself 'theos epiphanes'='God is manifest' and coins minted as such, but nicknamed by others 'epimanes'='madman'). 1 & 2 Maccabees describes his deeds. He ruled the Selucid Empire of Syria from BC 176-164. After being humiliated and forced to leave Egypt, Antiochus's vengeance was quickly turned upon Jerusalem. He killed over eighty thousand men, women, and children and sold forty thousand into slavery (2 Macc. v. 5-14). He persecuted the Jews and forced Greek culture -outlawed Torah, circumcision, Jewish sacrifice (punishable by death) and desecrated the Temple sacrificing a pig on the altar, turning it into a brothel and a temple to Zeus. This was the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel 8:9-26 (esp. V11-14); 11:21-35- (esp v31). Judas Maccabeus overcame this and won back the temple rededicating it- Hannukah. Antiochus' cruelty can be seen in this quote:

'Throwing them headlong with their infants off of the highest wall in Jerusalem, Antiochus killed two mothers who had circumcised their children in defiance of the law. He also cut out the tongues of a mother's seven sons and after that had each of them roasted alive on a flat iron' (2 Macc. vii. 3-5)

Before Jerusalem and it's Temple and inhabitants were destroyed by Titus' army in AD 70 the Christians were warned by an angel and by remembering Christ's words to flee (Mt 24:16) and fled to Pella (in the Decapolis, Galilee). The Romans caused the daily sacrifice to cease and, not in Titus' intentions, an unruly soldier burned the temple.

Bar Kochba ('son of the star' -messianic title from Numbers 24:17 'star shall come out of Jacob') was hailed in a revolt against the Romans in 132-136 AD as the messiah after the failed Jewish revolt against the Romans in AD70. However, he failed and over .5 million Jews were killed and the diaspora became a reality.

The antichrist as a person- Matt 24:15. In 2Thess 2:1-10 'Lawless one/man of sin/son of perdition', goes into God's house and proclaims himself as God. Some see in this the rebuilding of the Jewish temple on the temple mount.

- **Birth Pains/traumatic events in the world- Matt 24:6-8**
- Jesus tells us this sign for us not to be fearful -God has not abandoned the world, and these things don't mean it's the end- however, Jesus is coming soon
- Sarah in labour- huge pains- investigated -hardly dilated 'we don't call these pains, just 'tightenings''- Man who stars on B.T adverts during an interview- 'yes I am having a baby soon, when the wife starts screaming'
- 'The end is nigh'- doom and gloomers -Jesus said 'the end is not yet' Mt 24:6. Mt 24:8- beginning of sorrows- word 'sorrows' means 'labour pains.'
- Increase in wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences (HIV, SARS, MRSA, swine flu, bird flu, B.S.E). Signs in the heavens and on earth -see Lk 21:25-26-'signs in the

heavenlies'- global warming- increase in hurricanes, Katrina, tornadoes Burma Cyclone, 'sea and waves roaring', floods, tsunamis

- The world will get troubled by these signs- Jesus said 'see that you are not troubled'- Mt 24:6. We understand that this world is temporary and passing away for the permanence of Heaven. The curse against us due to sin affected our fabric-earth.
- Final signs- the heavenly bodies will be shaken- Matt 24:29- stars falling etc. Just prior to Christ's return.
- **Worldwide Persecution- v9**
- Jesus tells us this sign for us not to give up our faith when we are persecuted
- All nations will hate you- Matt 24:9. This will result in betrayals v10 and v12 'the love of many will grow cold'- i.e. a falling away of those semi-committed to Christ.
- The characteristic of the anti-Christ will eventually be persecution of the saints- Dan 7:25, Rev 13:7 'It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation'..13:10 'He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.'

CHRISTIANS - THE MOST PERSECUTED PEOPLE GROUP ON EARTH

By Anthony Browne, Europe correspondent of the Times. Rising nationalism and fundamentalism around the world have meant that Christianity is going back to its roots as the religion of the persecuted. There are now more than 300 million Christians who are either threatened with violence or legally discriminated against simply because of their faith — more than any other religion. Christians are no longer, as far as I am aware, thrown to the lions. But from China, North Korea and Malaysia, through India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, they are subjected to legalised discrimination, violence, imprisonment, relocation and forced conversion. Even in supposedly Christian Europe, Christianity has become the most mocked religion, its followers treated with public suspicion and derision. I am no Christian, but rather a godless atheist whose soul doesn't want to be saved, thank you. I may not believe in the man with the white beard, but I do believe that all persecution is wrong. The trouble is that the trendies who normally champion human rights seem to think persecution is fine, so long as it's only against Christians.

- More Christians died for their faith in the twentieth century than at any other time in history, says Christian Solidarity International.

Italian sociologist Massimo Introvigne estimates that there were 105,000 Christian martyrs in 2011, "between 287 and 288 martyrs per day: twelve per hour, or one every five minutes," was a conservative estimate that could be adjusted up or down. Others have estimated that the average number of Christians martyred per year could be very much higher than this, in the region of 130,000-160,000.

- Jesus gives this sign so that we don't give up our faith when we are persecuted, even if it leads to death (as in many nations today).

- **Worldwide Effectiveness of the Gospel-v14**
- Jesus tells us this sign as an incentive for us to share our faith
- **All Nations-v14** This gospel preached in all the world- Matt 24:14; Rev 14:6. With signs and wonders- 2 witnesses Rev 11-Moses & Elijah.

At slightly less than 2 billion, Christianity makes up about a third of the world population and approximately the same as the two next largest religions combined; Islam and Hinduism. Christianity is also the only religion represented in all 238 surveyed countries.

The largest religion (Christianity) is approx. 68% larger than the second largest religion (Islam) and 246% larger than the third largest religion (Hinduism). (Source- Christian World Encyclopedia)

- Rev 7:9- all nations, tribes, peoples, tongues and they have come out of the great tribulation i.e. suffered in the persecution-Rev 7:14.
- Both happen at same time- Church thrives under persecution- just as at start so as at end, only greater- Jesus saved best till last.
- **Israel- 23:39** Israel will recognise Jesus as the Christ- Matt 23:39
- Temple left desolate (23:38) because they didn't recognise Christ. Won't see Christ

until they are ready to receive Him- i.e. Christ will come back (2nd coming) when the Jews are ready to receive Christ.

- Rom 11:15,25-27- their restoration means life from the dead, and the Lord will turn godlessness away from Zion.
- Israel mourning for the one they pierced as for an only son- Zech 12:10-13:2
- Ez 36 and 37- valley of dry bones becomes alive again- revival in Israel.
- Sealing of 12 tribes- Rev 7:4-8 144,000 sealed- 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes- after this saw multitude from every nation- 7:9. Also in Rev 14:1-5 contrasted with Rev 14:6- gospel to every nation. So God remembers the Jews.
- **Application-**
- So these are the signs of the end of the world & return of Jesus: Deception, World-Trauma, Worldwide Persecution, Worldwide Evangelism. However, when we get to glory Jesus isn't going to give us an end-times theology test- He will look at how we have lived. When He explained the end times to His disciples He summarised it with 'be ready', saying He would come as a thief in the night at an unexpected hour.
- A thief is sneaky, comes when can't be seen-
Guy who opened my door in early hours in nurses home at Pen-y-fal, guy who tried to break into social club with pillow, person who stole my bass amp off my back seat catching me unawares as I nipped into nurses home.
Will take the world by surprise (thief in night, Noah, Lot), but should not take Christians by surprise- live as those ready for it.
- 1Thess 5:4 Paul says 'But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.' Paul then goes on to say that because we belong to the light we should live that way, like Christ is about to return (that's how the early church lived, how much more so now!) sober and alert rather than asleep- i.e walk as a Christian.
- However, Paul finishes by saying to put on the 'breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation for God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore, comfort each other and edify one another, just as you are doing.' (1Thess 5:8b-11). Being alert as a Christian includes having an unshakable assurance of salvation- that our salvation does not depend on us but on Christ- we live a life of good works to glorify Christ, but we depend on His good work on the cross rather than on ourselves- this is putting on the helmet of salvation- it is a revelation of the gospel of grace.

How is the King returning?-

- **As king- v30** 'with great power and great glory'. Came as a babe in a manger first time, His return will be as the King in glory- hence this is His kingdom coming in it's fullness- all the miraculous signs and wonders in the Kingdom of God were just the starters- this is the main course!
- **Publicly-v27** 'as lightening is visible from one end of the heavens to the other'- all to experience it, not secretive- i.e. all will see it. **V31** 'with a great sound of a trumpet'- the loudest sound you will ever hear- loud enough to wake the dead (literally!) 1Thess 4:16- 'The Lord Himself will descend with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.' People in a deep sleep can sleep through thunder storms- this will be louder! Don't be fooled by weird rumours that Jesus has already returned, secretly, 'to the outer heavens'. We don't need to worry about missing it, we will know when it happens- every person in history, the good and bad will be there.
- **Bodily-v30** 'the Son of Man will appear'- son of man means a human being (as well as the title from Daniel about the man whom all nations will worship). He is with us now by His Spirit, but one day He will bodily be with us. 'Coming' in verses 3, 27,

37,39=*Parousia*- the physical presence, especially of a king. We love His Spirit with us now, but one day He will be physically with us! We will not need Spiritual gifts then- 1Cor 13:9-12 we will know Him fully, even as He presently fully knows us- we will be walking with Him as Adam & Eve did in the garden. Jesus was raised physically and ascended physically. There is now a physical person- Jesus, at the right hand of the Father in glory. He will physically descend in the same way He went up (see Acts 1:11)

- Because He was raised physically, so shall we be- a solid resurrected body! Believers who are left on earth when Christ returns will be changed in the blink of an eye into their resurrection bodies-1Cor 15:51-52 . Jesus will bring with Himself all who have died 'in Him' and they will be raised first 1Thess 4:14-18

Why is the King returning?

- **For His people- v31** 'to gather His elect from the four winds'. Jesus is coming back for His bride- becoming a Christian in this life is just the engagement, the wedding is on it's way! He is coming to take us to Heaven- John 14:2-3 'In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.'
- **To judge the world- v30** 'all the tribes of the earth will mourn'- what people think they have got away with will be revealed on that day of judgement. A true king brings justice- He will bring justice in punishing those who have rejected Him and mercy to those who have trusted in Him. The results will be Heaven and Hell.
- There will be varying rewards in Heaven for Christians according to how they have walked with the Lord- whilst some have built very deep purses in Heaven, others will have their works burnt up and enter heaven as one being snatched through the flames.
- The defeat of Satan will be fully implemented, sin will be eradicated once and for all. 2Thess 2:8 the lawless one (the Antichrist) will be consumed by the breath of Jesus' mouth (like a candle blown out) and destroyed by the brightness of His coming (like the shadows fleeing when you flick a light on).
- **To renew all things- v29** 'the stars will fall from the heavens'. In Isaiah 65:17 it says "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind". In Rev 21:1 it says 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away...' and Rev 21:5 says 'Behold I make all things new'
- "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:4

Summary

As a response to this teaching, let's live this day and every day as if Christ is returning today. Let's place our confidence in His work of salvation for us, but let's not be complacent- let's live our lives so that we are not ashamed at His coming.

In this last part of the series on the Kingdom of God we have answered:

- **When is the King returning?**
- **How is the King returning?**
- **Why is the King returning?**

Song: *There is a day*

*Available on many websites but taken from <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/jehovah.html> which reads: The 1889 issue, "The Time is at Hand," page 101 states, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." This 1914 prediction of Christ's return never came true. Then the *Watch Tower* predicted that Christ would return in 1925. The 1918 issue of, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," p. 89 states, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the apostle in Hebrews 11 to the condition of human perfection." This proved to be another false prophecy. The *Watch Tower* made a third prophecy of the return of Christ; this one was to occur in 1975. The August 15, 1968, issue of, *Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?*, p. 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Once again the Witnesses were shown to be false prophets. If the Witnesses don't believe these articles are real, tell them to look them up in their church's library. Another interesting prophecy is found on page 154 of their book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. Here they state, "Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end of the system of things and survive it." Most of the 1914 generation are dead, and the few remaining are very old. In just a few years, the *Watch Tower* will again have another false prophecy. When presented clearly, the record of the *Watch Tower's* false prophecies is a very effective tool in witnessing to Jws.

Some background material for further study/reflection

Why do different Christians interpret the 'signs' Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24 differently?

- Scriptures about the end times pass through our lens of interpretation:
Car treasure hunt- getting clues and thinking you are doing well, but you are seeing what you want to see- each view of end times will see their clues come up due to their lens of interpretation. Car treasure hunts are tricky, as is trying to piece together information about the end times, especially because the book of Revelation is full of symbols- it's tricky, therefore we need grace where other Christians may interpret things differently to us.
- About 4 major schools of thought concerning the End Times and particularly in their interpretation of the book of Revelation (see Winkie Pratney & Barry Chant's book *The Return*, 1991 *Sovereign World*). This will, in turn, influence the way Matthew 24 signs are interpreted:
 - **Praeterist**- Latin *praeterie*='to pass/go by'. Praeterists believe the prophecies in Revelation have mainly been fulfilled already & they were written for that time. . 7 Kings of Rev 17= 7 Roman emperors, the harlot is Rome etc. Letters to the 7 churches=just to them. View favoured by scholars of more traditional churches.
 - **Historicist**- Historicists believe the book of Revelation= world history from Christ's first coming to His second coming. Time periods mentioned are interpreted as a day=a year. The letters to the 7 churches= 7 church ages from N.T to now. Need detailed knowledge of history. View popular during reformation. Antichrist seen as the papal system, the little scroll from Rev. 10 seen as the Bible, printed & distributed by the Reformers.
 - **Futurist (dispensationalism)**- Futurists believe God's dealings with mankind through history are divided up into dispensations (periods) of time. The major part of the bk. Revelation fulfilled at the end of the age. Figures for time periods are taken literally rather than day=year. Indefinite period of time between Daniel chapter 9's 69th and 70th year so the final seven years could happen at any time. View especially popular amongst Pentecostals.
 - **Idealist**- Idealists believe the book of Revelation does not refer to specific events but to principles of God's dealing in the life of His people. Events in the book are applicable to all generations and no specialist historical knowledge is necessarily required. This view is popular amongst a number of evangelical scholars.
- The most important aspect of our theology is that we believe in the return of Christ, not that we need to agree on each other's interpretations of the specifics. We need grace to share different opinions without dividing. Also, it is worth a look through other's lenses when we look at the end times to see if we can learn something.
- I don't fit into one camp but have aspects of them all- Praeterist regarding the letters to the Churches in Rev. Historicist in that I do not discount that parts of Revelation may be speaking about later times in history than the early church, but not necessarily always the very end. Futurist in that I think much of Rev speaks into the very last days and share some interpretations about the indefinite gap between the 69th & 70th seven (although I am not pre-trib, and think the trib will be 3.5 years), idealist in that I am amillennial and believe Rev. contains principles for all ages of the Church (although I am not a depressive amillennial- this gospel age is glorious and the gospel will bear fruit in all nations at the same time as persecution in all nations).

What is the immediate context of Matthew 24?

- Although the signs Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 spoke of the signs of His return they also spoke of events which were about to affect that particular generation.

- Any text taken out of context is a pretext- we need to look at the context of the passage we are studying today and ask what was its context? The context is that Jesus knows that many in Jerusalem are plotting His death. He has just denounced the scribes and Pharisees for being hypocrites and shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men, not going in themselves and hindering others from entering (Mt 23:13). He has just pronounced judgement upon Jerusalem of that time ('this generation'- Mt 23:36) for their rejection of the King who had sent them many prophets in the past in an attempt to gather them like a nurturing hen, but they had killed the messengers and now they were about to kill the king Himself (Mt 23:29-39).
- Therefore Jesus predicts that within that particular generation (i.e. within 40 years) judgement would fall. The judgement would be the opposite of God gathering them like a hen- they were going to be scattered, because they refused to be gathered- 23:37. This hints at the warnings in Deuteronomy 28 about Israel being scattered from the land of Israel due to breaking covenant with God (although, encouragingly, God said in Deuteronomy 30 that He promised to bring them back afterwards when they repented).
- The judgement would also be that their temple would be desolate (23:38). This was literally fulfilled 40 years later in A.D.70 when the temple was sacked by the Romans after a very long and horrific siege where the Romans built a bank around the city and many inside starved to death. The warnings of Jesus to nursing mothers (24:19) became particularly relevant as people starved and there is even an account of a woman eating her child, as the Jewish historian Josephus records (Wars of the Jews, book vii., chap. ii.; see also Deut 28:53; Lev 26:29; 2Kings 6:28; Lam 4:10).
- So, Jesus' words had an initial fulfilment in A.D. 70 and also a short while later (132-136 AD) with the false Messianic figure, Bar Kochba who rallied many but was defeated by the Romans, resulting in the Diaspora, the scattering of the Jews throughout the world.