

“We Begin at the End”
Matthew 24:36 – 44; Romans 13:11 – 14

Those are our readings this morning.

They come from what is known as the lectionary.

The lectionary are set readings for every Sunday of the year and go through a 3 year cycle.

The intent is that in 3 years you will have or preached through most of Scripture.

So today, throughout New Zealand and many parts of the world, these passages will be preached.

I’m not someone who usually uses the set readings but coming into this Sunday I sensed it was the way to go.

But having said that, it doesn’t seem that “Christmassy” – and that’s because it’s Advent not Christmas.

Advent means “coming” or “arrival”.

In Advent we prepare for Christmas Day by reflecting on the coming or arrival of Jesus.

This morning we begin at the end.

So where how do we begin to think about this passage?



When some Christians read Matthew 24 verses 36 to 44, what do they automatically think of?

*Life was filled with guns and war
And everyone got trampled on the floor
I wish we'd all been ready*

*Children died the days grew cold
A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold
I wish we'd all been ready*

*There's no time to change your mind
The son has come and you've been left behind
A man and wife asleep in bed
She hears a noise and turns her head
He's gone
I wish we'd all been ready*

So Larry Norman penned the words in 1969, a song written about... the *Rapture*.

Jesus will come and take Christians away from the planet and for the next 7 or 3 ½ years there will be hell on earth.

This is not a “Rapture” passage

It has to be said, this is not a passage about the so-called “Rapture”. That has to be said because this passage is used a lot.

Now before you are outraged, let’s look at the passage more closely:

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.
³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until **the flood** came and **took them** all away.”

We’ll pause here.

Jesus is comparing his coming, the Second Advent with the flood of Genesis.

The flood in Genesis was what?

An act of God’s judgement where the world was purged of evil.

We’re told that it was cleansed; the corrupted, debased were what by the flood?

The flood “took them all away” and Noah’s family remained in the ark.

Then Jesus says:

“That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”

So Jesus is making a direct comparison.

What will happen at the Second Advent is very similar to what happened in the flood.

Let's continue:

“⁴⁰Two men will be in the field; one will be **taken** and the other left.

⁴¹Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be **taken** and the other left.”

According to many end times preachers who are the ones taken away?

The Christians.

Who are the ones left behind?

Non-Christians.

Now here's my question: according to the words of *Jesus*, at His return, who will be “taken” away?

Not according to Dr. David Jeremiah or Hal Linsey or Tim Lahaye, but according to Jesus who will be “taken” and who will be left behind?

The flood took the wicked away; Jesus return will do the same.

You see, there is one group who do not know God.

They do not have a connection with Jesus. They are going about the normal activities of life when they are taken by surprise.

They don't know what's coming around the corner.

It is *this group* that will be taken away.

So who is left behind?

The other group *that does know God and Jesus* – Noah and company.

And they do know what's coming and they are left behind.

True? According to what Jesus is saying.

Who's heard this before???

So what do you think about that?

Tell the person next to you.

So if it's not about the Rapture, then what is it about?

It's not about the rapture, it's about being ready for Jesus' return and the salvation he will bring with him.

Paul says in reference to the end that "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed".

Now some people will say, "Hang on a moment, I'm already saved... aren't I?"

"Do I have to wait for Jesus to return to be sure (of my salvation)?"

How would you respond to that?

Again, tell the person next to you.

Salvation is talked about in three ways in Scripture, three tenses.

We have *been* saved from the penalty of sin; we are *being* saved from the power of sin; we *shall be* saved from the presence of sin.

You *have been* saved.

Salvation is being saved from sin and death and condemnation. This sin, this *self*-rule and *self*-directed life, that chooses against God creates a barrier, a wall between you and God.

And nothing we can do can take away that wall.

So this salvation happens when you come under the rule of King Jesus who's coronation was a death on Roman Cross. On that cross, even though he was King and innocent, he died our place, to take away your sins and my sins. But death did not have the final say. He rose from the dead, in the power of the Spirit, vindicated by his Father. And he now offers this salvation to all people.

Have you accepted the gift of salvation?
Have you said sorry for your sins, received God's forgiveness that comes through the cross and come under his rule?

When that happens a shift occurs. You have a change of address. You go from a kingdom marked by darkness, by lostness and sin and you are brought into a kingdom of light, and purpose and meaning and freedom.

This is not an endpoint; it's only the beginning.

You are *being* saved.

Paul writes to those who being saved.¹

In other words, you and I are a work in progress.

You and I are undergoing a makeover...

In 2020 \$44 billion was spent on cosmetic surgery globally.

Breast augmentation, Nose reshaping (Rhinoplasty), eyelid surgery, liposuction and Tummy tuck (Abdominoplasty).

However two-thirds of people are honest enough to express cosmetic surgery remorse.

We're told in Scripture that God has begun a *good work in you*.

Scripture talks of growing in holiness, of bearing fruit, resisting temptation – of being transformed by God.

That means, even now you can be different.

You can be a different kind of person.

You're not stuck with yourself.

You can make progress.

You don't have to be stuck.

Sometimes the changes come through wrestling.

Sometimes in moments of insight.

God keeps his promises. He is at work to bring about the best 'you'.

If that doesn't give you hope, I don't know what will.

You *will* be saved.

At Jesus coming our salvation will be complete.

I mean, in the current state of things we still age and die.

We are still at the mercy of illness and injury.

I have a back at times that gives me... issues.

You will receive the gift of a new mind and a new body.

Those who have gone before will be raised to full and glorious life.

There will be a wonderful reunion.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15

The planet itself will be changed because there will be judgement.

I don't know about you but have you heard say, I wish somebody just do something!

The West in particular is in a fragile place.

No more war.
No more threat of nuclear annihilation.
No more lock downs.
No more ram-raids.
No more diary robberies.
No more mental health crisis.
No more gun violence.
No more racism.

So those who do not know Jesus are taken away and do not get to enjoy God's restoration and renewal of the Earth.

But those who do know Jesus are left behind are left to enjoy God's renewal of the Earth, His new creation, His fully redeemed planet.

Many Christians talk about the end of the age as being terrible an terrifying, even for Christians.

But this is our hope that we reflect on at Advent – that your world and the world will be changed, renewed, different.

Not that we will be whisked away.

The hope of Advent is God's future is invading the present.

“But no one knows the day nor the hour...”

If no one knows the day nor the hour, so what kind of people should we be?

Many people think it's about being sign-watchers.

When the EU grew to have ten members, it was a sign – it's the ten horns of the beast in Revelation!
Now the EU has 27 members...

Jesus says that life will be fairly normal when he returns; dinner parties, weddings, commerce and labour will still feature.

Paul says, "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here."
But he doesn't then say, "Watch for the signs".

He says, "Put aside the deeds of darkness...", walk in the light, clothe yourself with Christ.

In other words, there is call to watch... to watch over your life.

It's a call to holiness which every generation of Christians have been called to have.

To be marked out as a people living for the coming King.

The Advent season – that anticipates the Second Advent – is an opportunity to get your life right with God.

The thing is, there is something lingering in our lives, it actually squelches hope. The longer it lingers, the greater the despair.

But God, he's not begrudging.

He says, "Come, let me make you clean."

As you come to the table, let this be the place where you know his forgiveness this morning

The other takeaway is that we are bearers of hope *now*.

Hope is the possibility of a different future, that your and my life and the lives of people we love about, that things can be different!

You can have quality of life after you die, a quality of life when Jesus returns *and* a quality of life *now*.

And so many people are not experiencing that today.

The statistics are there.

My hope is that we would be the kind of church where you feel comfortable to bring your friends or family that they might find hope.

My hope is that in your conversations, at your BBQ's and in your Christmas work functions or even over fence, you and I will be able to share a word of hope.