

St Mark Grenoble
Advent Sunday
27th November, 2022
Micah 4: 1 - 7
Matthew 24: 30 - 44
'The Days to Come'

Good morning. Welcome! - whether you're here in Church, or joining on Zoom ...
Let's Pray:

OK - before I start, it will be good to hear from you:

First, what day is it today?? ... Advent Sunday; What does 'Advent' actually mean??
Coming - So what, or who, is coming and why is Advent important??

Yes, Advent is a period of four weeks, in the Church Year, before Christmas. It's a penitential time to prepare our hearts, minds and lives for the arrival of Jesus, Our Saviour, God's Son, born in the most humble situation, to redeem God's people. And today's readings could be a good place to begin.

So, what struck you about today's readings - what puzzled you, what challenged you?? OK Thank you.

Most of you know my fascination with Scripture, and working out how it applies to us. I was challenged when I saw today's readings; in fact I've been challenged every time I've preached on these passages over the last 20 years – it never gets easier!

They look simple at first glance, but these passages are multi-layered, with so much in them and all the scholars have something different to say about them; it's almost impossible to deal with them in one sermon. So, I hope you're not in a rush!

Both today's readings have one thing in common - they look ahead through really tough times, to the return of God's promises of hope and redemption ahead.

Looking briefly at the reading from the Book of Micah first; many of his prophecies are similar to some in Isaiah. In fact, these prophets both lived around the same time, which was a very troubled period indeed for the people of Judah.

It's possible God was giving them both the same messages for the Judean people; or it's possible that whoever wrote the prophecies down (afterwards), couldn't be absolutely certain who had preached which ones.

But the part we heard today, promises that after the destruction of Jerusalem, 'When all is said and done' God's Temple on the Mountain (in Jerusalem) will be firmly fixed and will tower above the others around. It's a promise of restoration and Micah says: 'Let's climb God's mountain, Let's go to the temple of Jacob's God ... and ... He will teach us how to live ... we'll learn to live the way God intended and true teaching will issue from Zion (Jerusalem)'.

Listen to these beautiful words: 'Nations will quit fighting each other and quit learning how to kill each other; God's revelation will establish justice in the rabble of nations and settle disputes in pfaraway places ... they'll trade swords for shovels and spears for rakes and hoes. Each woman will tend her own garden in safety'. God says so, and He means what he says.

Amazing isn't it, that prophecy was made around 2500 - 3000 years ago; it was vital for the people to hear those words then; and we still really need to hear them today.

God's people keep on messing up, and keep on letting Him down; but, remarkably, He continues to keep on forgiving and restoring us.

As we move on to the Gospel, from Matthew; to understand it better, we should first look at the context. – Over the last couple of chapters, Jesus was talking about His love for Jerusalem, and His sadness at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, and what they represented. – He was predicting their punishment. That included His prophecy of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was seen as the heart, or seat, of the establishment.

We also need to understand Matthew was writing in a kind of code, because it wouldn't have been wise for him to write too openly about these things.

Part of my fascination with scripture is that, as well as speaking into one specific situation - in this case, Jesus' prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem, and destruction of the Temple; (which happened, as predicted, around 40 years after His death); the same passage has an equally powerful message for us, many generations later; because there are further messages built into it on one, or two, different levels.

On one level Jesus was speaking about the need to be constantly prepared for His second coming – warning it will be totally unannounced in advance.

Then, on another level, He was talking about the need to be prepared for our own death, which may well also come when we least expect it.

That's the day we'll meet God face to face and we'll be called to give account of ourselves before Him. Are you ready to give account of yourself??

And, to emphasise the challenge, there are graphic reminders, of people (in the days of Noah) Everyone carrying on as usual, having a good time, right up to the day Noah boarded the ark; blissfully unaware of what was about to happen – ‘they knew nothing, until the flood hit and swept everything away’.

Then we’re warned - The Son of Man’s arrival will be like that (Totally unexpected) Followed by graphic word pictures: Two men working in the fields together; the two women grinding corn together on a hand mill this close to each other; in each case the word picture tells us ‘One is taken, and one is left.’

Here’s a challenging question, who is the fortunate one? The one taken, or the one left behind? Is the one taken, taken in death and damnation; or the one taken to a better place?? Is the one left, left to carry on living, or left out of a better life to come?

We have been firmly warned - You have no idea what day your Master will show up!

And, finally, woven into all this, is the picture of the burglar in the night; coming when no-one expects him, because if the homeowner had known what time of night he would arrive, he would have been there with his dogs to prevent the break in.

Is that a picture of Jesus at His second coming? I’m not sure, because would you really want to describe your Messiah, our Saviour, as a thief ?? – Possibly not!!

Scripture is challenging isn’t it? Have I answered all your questions?? Are you clear exactly where this passage is going?? You know I really hope not!

Because I think we are all supposed to wrestle with it.

If all else fails, remember the Scout Motto – ‘Be Prepared’. Be ready for God’s unexpected arrival ...

But, above all, do not ever be afraid: Because Jesus told us He came to earth so that all our sins, our shortcomings, may be forgiven.

All we need to do is to turn to Jesus, invite Him into our lives and let Him change us.

Remember this Advent: we’re told in Acts 2:21: ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’.

So, I hope you have fun wrestling with the stories we read this Advent; and may God bless you as you do!

Let’s Pray ...