

Roger Simpson, St Marc's 12/11/2023 Are we ready ?

INTRODUCTION

1 We come today to the next story in Matthews gospel. Last Sunday we saw that Jesus predicted his return. His second coming to earth. He did this while he was with his disciples on the mount of Olives. Overlooking Jerusalem.

2 There are certain things that we don't know about the second coming, but there are also certain things that we do know

A THINGS WE DON'T KNOW

1 Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that no one knows the day or the our of his coming. Not the angels in heaven, not the Son but only the father so there were certain questions to which even Jesus did not know the answer

B THINGS WE DO KNOW.

1 Jesus tells us to learn the lesson from the fig tree " when the leaves are out then you know, that summer is near" Jesus told his disciples that if we look out for the signs, then we will know His coming is near

2 what are the signs? When he tells us" you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. Nation will rise against a nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

3 I never really understood this until we had our first son Tom.(story about the contractions. Middlesex Hospital. Nurse we will ring you.!) As his birth got nearer contractions increased in severity and regularity. We can expect the signs that Jesus speaks about to come more and more regularly and more and more severely before his return.That is happening all around the world. We're not to be alarmed.

4 And we're also to expect to see the gospel going out to all the nations " this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Let's look now at Matthew 25, verse 1 to 13. It's a very well-known parable. It's one of five that Matthew includes about the second coming of Jesus Christ.

CONTEXT.

1 we need to understand a little bit of the background to the story. The parable is about a wedding. In the culture of that time . On the wedding day, the BRIDEGROOM goes to the brides house for the Ceremony. (That's a little bit like the marriage service in our church today)

2 then the BRIDE and the GROOM , along with a great procession, returned to the grooms house, where the feast took place. This feast would often last for a whole week! This is like the RECEPTION we have today.

3 The TEN VIRGINS were waiting to join the procession. They hoped to take part in the wedding banquet. But when the groom didn't come at the expected time, five of them ran out of lamp oil. By the time they had purchased some extra oil, the door was shut, and it was too late to join the feast.

Q WHAT IS JESUS SAYING ?

When Jesus returns to take his people into heaven, we must BE READY! Spiritual preparation cannot be BOUGHT and neither can it be BORROWED.

THE VIRGINS stand for Christian people. People like you and me!! HALF of them were prepared for his coming. They had the lamps required for any night time Wedding and they had taken the trouble to put oil in them.

The other HALF were not prepared, should the bridegroom choose to come at night. The message in the light of the return of Christ at the end of time is BE PREPARED. Most of the Jews were not prepared when Jesus came the first time, and they have not gone in with the BRIDEGROOM. But Jesus hopes for better things from his church.

THERE ARE THREE SURPRISES IN THE STORY.

a. THE GIRLS ALL LOOKED THE SAME , BUT THEY WERE NOT !

only half of them were ready for the wedding feast. They wanted to enjoy the festivities with the bride and groom, and then the door was shut ! What a warning to us. It tells us that it is possible to be in church often, and even in Christian company, and yet be a stranger to the HOLY SPIRIT. It is possible to have a lamp that looks good, but it has no oil in it.! it is possible that one day Jesus may have to say” I never knew you” that was a great surprise to church goers in Matthews day and in ours !

b THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CANNOT BORROW.

You need to possess them for yourself. It is simply not possible to rely on anyone else for them. HOLINESS is one of those things. It cannot be traded. If you are not, what you profess to be, nobody else can help you or or stand in for you! The bride groom will come. The door will be shut.

c THERE ARE SOMETIMES WHEN IT IS TOO LATE!

“Too late! “Is a terrible verdict. “I’m sorry you’re just too late.” (It’s what somebody said to me the other Sunday when Ursula and I went to a restaurant which had been highly recommended to us for her birthday. We were just too late.!! Imagine the disappointment. It was her birthday!)

And there are many people who will be on the Earth when Jesus returns, who are not ready for him. and it will be just too late. Hell is a reality. An awful reality.

“ the job has been lost – you’ve lost the contract” I’m sorry but you failed the exam.” “the the divorce has come through”-it’s too late to make amends”

And those terrible words are never more frightening than when applied to the second coming. Make sure you don’t miss the party.! That is what Jesus means. Readiness is the key! Have you bowed the knee to Jesus Christ? Have you personally accepted Jesus Christ. If you haven’t come and have a chat with me afterwards.

WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN AT THE SECOND COMING? Can you turn to our second reading, 1 Thessalonians,4 v,13 - 18.

we looked at this passage in some detail a few weeks ago so I’m not going to go through it again in detail. But I would like to say 2 things.

1 IF WE ARE IN CHRIST WE ARE SAFE.

We do not know when Christ is going to come back. But if we are in Christ and Christ is in us we are safe. The Lord Jesus Christ presides over our death. Both in the timing of it,

when we die. But also in the manner of it, how we die. And in the circumstances in which it occurs. It is too important a matter for us to leave to anyone else. So we don't need to be anxious about our own death. We either die in Jesus or we die in our sins. There is no middle ground.

2 BECAUSE JESUS CAME BACK TO LIFE, SO WILL ALL BELIEVERS

All Christians, including those who are living when Christ returns, will live with Christ forever. Therefore you do not need to despair when someone you love dies. Or when world events take a tragic turn (as they are right now, for many other brothers and sisters in Ukraine, Sudan, in the Middle East, in North Korea)

When Christ returns, God will turn our TRAGEDIES into TRIUMPHS He will turn our POVERTY into RICHES He will turn our PAIN into GLORY And he will turn our DEFEAT into VICTORY.

All believers throughout history will stand REUNITED in Gods very presence. Safe and secure.

As Paul comforted for Thessalonians, with the promise of the Resurrection, so we should COMFORT and REASSURE each other with this great hope. As one famous preacher in Britain said " one day, you will read that I have died. Don't believe it. I will be more alive than ever."

Let us pray

HOW CAN WE BE READY. ?

A We need to make sure we know Christ. Otherwise we will die in our sins and we will face the awful reality of judgement and Hell, Remember the BRIDEGROOM says to those girls who did not have any oil in their lamps " I don't know you " Here is a prayer if you don't know Jesus Christ. ".....

Thankyou. Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. I'm sorry for going my own way instead of your way. Thank you for dying on the cross to forgive my sin. Please come and take first place in my life and make me the person you want me to be. Come and tell me if you've prayed that prayer for the first time today.

B Those of us who know Jesus Christ. We need to guard our relationship with Him , and feed it. It's a bit like a marriage. You have to nurture your relationship otherwise it can grow cold. Lord help us to spend time with you each day. And to meet regularly with your people on a Sunday and during the week. To be devoted to you. Fan into flame Lord the gift of your Holy Spirit. Help us to stay close to you. Amen