

St Marc's, Grenoble

Matthew 24.1-14

Jesus is coming: how will I know?

Aim: Don't be deceived, don't be alarmed, do be ready

Last week one of our son's and his family come to stay. Our son had to take a wedding in Nimes! Roger and I prepared - the beds, the food. We borrowed toys for the children. We were ready for them.

But a few years ago, we'd invited friends for dinner. It was in our diaries. Imagine how embarrassed we felt when the day before there was a knock on the door and there were our friends standing there! We had planned what to give them but we hadn't cooked anything. Someone got the date wrong... The best thing to do was to take them out to a restaurant for a meal which was very expensive for us.

We weren't ready for them!! It cost us a lot of money. But, if we're not ready for Jesus when he comes again, it'll cost us our life!

Jesus is going to come at a time we don't expect - like a thief in the night. He won't come as a baby this time - but as Lord, King and Judge. He will be clearly seen when he comes. Like a thunder storm in Grenoble. Everyone will see. This will be the end of the world as we know it. It'll be Judgement Day - when everyone who has not bowed the knee to Jesus will be eternally banished from his presence

Are you ready for Jesus? If you're not sure, you probably aren't. How do we know when he's going to come? What will be the signs?

The disciples asked Jesus that very question when Jesus said that the temple would be torn down.

They are puzzled. v3, 'When will this happen (the destruction of the temple)? What will be the sign of your coming again (the second coming of Jesus) and how will we know it's the end of the age? To them it was all going to happen at the same time. They run together three separate questions.

What are the signs? How will we know?

First of all **a certainty**. Jesus predicted that the magnificent temple would be torn down, every stone of it. The Romans did this in AD 70. 40 years after Jesus said this. We've seen in Jerusalem enormous stones lying on the ground.

Jesus' second coming is as certain as the destruction of the temple.

People have always been predicting Jesus' second coming and the end of the world. When the twin towers in New York were bombed, some thought the end of the world was coming. Now, with the horrific events happening in Gaza. Will Iran, Russia, the US all get involved - and then Jesus come?

Jesus says, v36, *that no-one knows the day or hour, not the angels in heaven, not even Jesus, only the Father!* But these are signs. We see wars, famines, earthquakes, floods, global warming, nuclear threats.

During the first Covid lockdown we moved out of our house so that our daughter and her family from London could live in the country with their 3 boys. She was pregnant and wanted to have her baby at home. When it's a home delivery, the midwives don't want to be called out to wait around. They will only come out when they know the contractions are coming regularly and strongly. Then they know that the baby will be born soon.

Mary Jane knew that her babies arrive very quickly. When her contractions were coming regularly, her husband phoned. 'No, no, they said, just wait.' The midwives had to drive for 40 minutes from the city. Poor Guy began to feel that he would be delivering this baby. He phoned again. Please come quickly; the baby is nearly here! Guy knew that once contractions had started the baby was going to be born.

Birth pangs don't stop until the baby is born. Jesus says that all these disruptive events in the world are like birth pangs, v8. These **disruptions in the world** are signs says Jesus. 'You **will**, v6, hear of wars and rumours...v7, Nation **will** rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There **will** be famines and earthquakes.' Don't be surprised. Don't be alarmed. Signs of the end times. Marks of creation groaning because of the fall. A mother longs for the birth of her child. The whole of creation longs for the coming of the King of Kings, the Lord of All.

People see terrible events happening and say, 'I can't believe in a God.' But Jesus says the opposite! These are signs that he is coming back. When you hear and see on your TVs dreadful things around the world, Jesus says v6, '*See to it you are **not alarmed.***' Don't be alarmed. This is what we are to expect - disruption, the disruption of creation, the birth pangs of God's new heaven and new earth.

Jesus is coming. How will we know? **First, disruption in the world. Second - distress.** Distress of the disciples. All around the world the church is being persecuted. Roger and I support the work of Barnabas Aid which works among the persecuted church. I read their news this week: '*Algerian church leader given two-year prison sentence. Twenty-nine killed in Christian-majority area of Myanmar by the military. Two Pastor's families targeted in Delta State, Nigeria. One pastor's son was killed. The other family was abducted.*'

This is what it's going to be like for Christians until Jesus comes. V9-11, (notice the word 'and'). '*You will be persecuted **and** put to death **and** hated. Many will turn away **and** betray **and** hate each other - **and** false prophets will appear **and** deceive many.*' Christians will be persecuted. Expect it. Hatred of Christians is hatred of Jesus. V9, '*You will be hated by all nations **because of me.***' It's Jesus they are hating. So if people are treating you bad because you're a Christian, don't be surprised. It's because of Jesus. One day people who hate him will be judged.

It's easy to take the soft road. Jesus wants his followers to be prepared. V10, Jesus says **many** will turn away, denying Jesus, betraying and hating each other. V11,

false prophets will deceive many. V12, Look what it says, 'the love of **most** will grow cold.' Many, most. Not just one or two - but most. We can think, 'my love for Jesus won't grow cold'. But Jesus says that it will **for most**.

This doesn't happen overnight. It happens gradually. If we stop speaking about Jesus, stop coming to church, stop praying and meeting with other Christians for fellowship, stop reading the Bible for ourselves. Because I'm tired, too busy, need to work - or just plain lazy! Our love for Jesus gradually gets colder and colder. This happens under persecution - but it also happens in ordinary life. Do I come to church just from habit? I'm sitting here. I sing the songs, but my mind is distracted, my heart is cold to Jesus.

What can I do? Ask Jesus to forgive you and fill you again. The best medicine is the Bible. You give medicine to your children when they are sick - morning and evening. Take your medicine!

Yes, says Jesus, there will be distress for his followers. He says, don't be alarmed, don't be deceived, stand firm, be ready.

But, hallelujah, there's also encouragement, v13. First, there will be an end to all this distress. Twice we read the word 'end'. '*He who stands firm **to the end** will be saved.*' There will be an end to the distress. It's on the horizon. We don't know how far away the horizon is - but 'stand firm' now. Don't deny Christ. Don't be deceived. Don't grow cold in your love for Jesus. Be encouraged - there is an end!

The other huge encouragement is in v14. '*The gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.*' The spread of the gospel.... Isn't it amazing how the gospel has spread right across the world? It began in Jerusalem.

We are looking at the Book of Acts in the Wednesday Fellowship. Last week we were reading how God sent Philip to speak to the Ethiopian Eunuch. Philip explained to him about Jesus and he was converted. He took the gospel back to his home country which was the Kingdom of Kush or Nubia.

A number of years ago Roger and I went to Mongolia with a team. Our church in York supported a missionary couple who worked there. When they went to work there, you could fit all the Christians in Mongolia on the back of a yak. There were 4 known Christians in Mongolia in 1989. Now there are over 900,000 Christians in Mongolia. Isn't that amazing? In 30 years! Wow!

There are nearly 2 and a half billion Christians in the world. That's about one third of the world's population call themselves Christian. They may not be truly born-again - but they call themselves Christians. One third of the world. Brazil has over 100m Christians. 90%. Nigeria over 80m - 50%, DR Congo has 63m - 95%. China has nearly 70 million Christians - 5%. The gospel has been spreading all over the world!

There are still millions who have not had an opportunity to hear the gospel. They are called 'Unreached People Groups'. People who have never heard the name of Jesus, who are completely ignorant of the King of Kings. They have no missionaries, no church, no fellowship of believers, no Christian material, no Bibles in these people groups. How can they be reached? How can they believe if they've never heard the gospel? In Bangladesh there are 135m unreached Shaikh. In India 59m

unreached Brahman, 58m unreached Yadav of India, 37m unreached Java Pesisir Lor of Indonesia. Have you ever heard of any of them? They reckon there are over 3000 ethnic people groups who are completely unreached with the gospel. 2 billion people. There's a job to be done!

Jesus says, '*This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.*' Nations are not what we call countries. They are people groups - tribes. Jesus does not say, This gospel *should* be preached. It's not a command. He said, '*It will be preached...*'. It's a great certainty, a great confidence. All those unreached people groups will have the gospel preached to them, brought to them. The Name of Jesus will spread right into every culture of the world - and then the end will come.

Let's pray

Lord Jesus, we long for your coming. We long for your name to glorified throughout the world. We long for the time when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We praise you that you were slain and purchased with your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation! Lord, we pray that you will send workers into your harvest field. Send me - and use me in your harvest field.

It may be that there is someone here who God is calling to bring his gospel to an unreached people group.

Please help us when we see huge disruptions around us in the world not to be alarmed. Help us to stand firm as you said. We pray too that we won't be deceived and lead astray. And Lord Jesus, I don't want my heart to grow cold. I don't want to deny you. Please warm my heart again - with love for you, love for your church and love for the lost.

We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen