

Text: Matthew 24.37-44
St Stephen's

Nov 28th, 2004
Sun AM Message Outline

He Could Come Back Today!

Thanksgiving: a wonderful time for our family. All our children and their spouses made it home. So there were 10 of us packed into our home. And 4 dogs and a cat! Whew! We went to Ohio to be with my parents and my brothers and their families. How we shared thanksgivings... I had an opportunity for many important conversations, ranging from the election to our families to our faith. It was a wonderful break for us.

We start into the **season of Advent** this week. I want to remind you that Jesus promised to come back. You and I don't think enough about the return of Jesus. But **he** did; he talked about it a lot. And so did his early followers. Did you know that **about 300 verses in the NT** refer to Jesus' return? Hebrews says,

Christ... will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Heb 9:28 (ESV)

In our **Creed** we confess: "*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead...*" But we are **not so sure!** C S Lewis, "The doctrine that Christ is coming is unpopular because it cuts across the plans and dreams of millions.

We have a date with the King! He has promised to come back soon. As a matter of fact, it **could be today!** I want to remind you what the Bible says about his return...

1. It Will Be Sudden

The bible says that His return will come when no one expects it, at a surprising time, when days seem very **normal**. Jesus stresses this.

For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ~~and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.~~ Matt 24:38-39

In the days of Noah, everything **seemed on the surface** like every other year and every other day. People were getting married and having kids and holding down jobs and eating and drinking – all the things normal people do. And no one could

tell it was all about to come to an end. They were just living their own normal lives. And then **suddenly** the floods came. Peter says...

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

2 Pet 3:10

He is saying you won't be able to predict it or see it or get ready for it – if you are not already ready for it.

*So you also must **be** ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.* Matt 24:44

Listen to how Jesus says it...

*“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! **You do not know when that time will come.**”* Mark 13:32-33

You have to get clear about this. Let me put it to you in two quick questions:

Is Jesus coming back? “Yes he is.”

When is Jesus coming back? “I don't know”.

He could come at any time; the Bible says he's **standing at the door**, with his hand on the knob, ready to enter. Jesus said he will come **suddenly**, when you do not expect him.

2. His Return Will Be Significant

When he returns it will be **decisive**. Then He will finally **fix** what is wrong with the world.

Before Thanksgiving a member of my extended family sent me a book, written by a couple of Buddhists, who want to **fix** what is wrong with the world. **Ridding the world of nuclear weapons** is one of their great objectives. Along the way they see a need for **the nations** of the world to **voluntarily surrender their sovereignty and armaments** to a one world government. They went on to argue for a **re-education** of all peoples in the ways of peace. It is an ambitious project.

Now the family member who gave me the book is a very important person in my life. So we talked about it last Thursday, and I said that **I also hold to the hope of a world at peace**, and said that the **Bible often speaks about this hope**. But I believe the **barriers** to this hope are so substantial, so deeply rooted in human nature, that it will take a **major intervention from God** to get us there. My family member believed that people could **evolve and develop towards perfection**, and

that as **people** evolve and develop and progress, **culture** could evolve and develop and progress with them. The biblical perspective is that evil in this world is so real and so deeply rooted that progress will be spotty at best until the Lord returns and sets the world right. I think the biblical perspective is backed up by the consistent witness of human history. That is why checks and balances are needed in the form of nations and laws and governments and international treaties and – if needed – armies.

The Bible does not speak of **worldwide evolutionary moral progress leading to heaven on earth**. **Stronger medicine is needed** to solve the challenge of human pride and sin. C.S.Lewis: *“The second coming of Christ is the medicine our condition needs.”* The Bible says that there will be a **sudden, violent end, imposed by God** – sort of like a volcano erupting or a plane crashing or the lights going out in a theater and the movie is over.

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

2 Peter 3:10-13

Then God will judge the nations, and there will be...

~~*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*~~

2 Peter 3:10-13

Strong medicine indeed. **Then** is time when the lion and the lamb will lie down together. When swords are beaten into ploughshares - **then** we shall see the gathering of the peoples of the world before a single throne, **then** we shall see the healing of the nations and the great forever day of peace....

When Jesus returns it will be **significant and decisive**. It'll be the end of history as we've known it. But it will be the beginning of the dawn.

3. His Return Will Be Separating

This is the third great theme of Christ's return. Listen to the words of Jesus:

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

Matt 24:40-41

When he steps back into history he will gather to himself all those who believe in him, who have trusted him as their Lord and Savior. Note how Jesus pictures

this: **outwardly** these people look the same. Two men working in a field – two women working at a mill. One is taken and the other is left. The difference between them was not in their employment or in what their activities on the day of his return. The difference between them was **inside**, within their hearts. Who they trusted. Who they lived for. Who they served. **The difference was decisive.** One was taken and the other was left behind. When he returns, there will be a great judgment. At the judgment there will be a separation.

~~“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.~~

Matt 25:31-32

Do you remember in school when you took a difficult class and you had a **final exam coming**, how you would have **loved to know the questions** that were on that final exam? There **is a final exam** at the end of history. You are going to have to **give an account** for your life. But you don't have to guess about the questions you will be asked. The Bible gives us a pretty good indication of what they will be. **God** has given them to us because he **wants us to pass this test.** There will be **two questions** that we must be prepared to answer on the Day of Judgment:

- **“*What did you do with my Son?”***

God is not going to ask about our religious history, or who our pastor was, or what the faith of our parents or our family was... He will ask us **what we did with his Son Jesus.** Did we open our hearts to his love and grace? Did we accept his sacrifice for our sins? Did we yield to his plan for our lives? Did we make him our first love above every love? Here's the second question...

- **“*What did you do with what I gave you?”***

What did you do with everything God gave you... your **years** upon this earth, your **relationships**, your **possessions**, your **jobs**, your **family**, your **opportunities** to serve and grow? Did you use them for God's purposes? Or did you spend them on yourself? Did you squander them and let them run between your fingers?

The **first question** is pass/fail, and it determines **where** you will spend eternity. The **second question** is graded on a scale, and it determines **what** you will be doing in eternity. This is **the final exam**, and He wants you to pass this test! I want to ask you a very important question: **Are you ready to take the test**, to give an account? He is coming soon – sooner than you expected. You have to be ready.

Let me finish with two comments about living this day in the light of the last day. **If you want to be ready for his return**, you have to...

Serve Him Where You Are

Living ready for his return doesn't mean stopping what God has given you to do. It means keeping at it until the day he returns. Jesus has given you a purpose for your life, and he wants you to keep at it. That is how to be ready for his return.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

Matt 24:45-46

The faithful servant didn't bail out on his task because he knew the master would be coming back. He kept at it. The **danger** that Jesus identifies here is not that they **defy** their master. The danger is that they will **just drift into missing their one and only opportunity to serve the master**. Here's a little poem about drifting...

*Procrastination is my sin, it only brings me sorrow
I know I ought to change my ways. In fact, I will – tomorrow*

Don't drift! You've been given **people** in your life. **You have today to love them**. Only today. You have **not yet been given tomorrow**. Some of you are just drifting along, and there's conflict that needs to be healed, there's something that needs to be forgiven, or there are words of truth that need to be spoken.

Make today count for Jesus.

Some of you have tasks God has given you to do. Ministries to launch. People to speak to about your faith. New initiatives for the Lord. Old initiatives that need a fresh effort. **You have today to move it forward**. Only today. You have **not yet been given tomorrow**. **Make today count for Jesus.**

Some of you are **compromising your walk with the Lord**. You are drifting along. You say, I'll get to that sometime, but for now I want to have my fun and do it my way. **You have today to get it right**. Only today to repent. You have **not yet been given tomorrow**. **Make today count for Jesus**.

Here's the deal: **your life matters**. This is your one and only life. You don't get another chance at this. Make it count. **Serve Him where you are, with all you are. Make your life count!**

Serve Him Ready to Go

The Bible says that your story and mine and the history of this whole human race is finally **the story of a God-groom who is looking for his bride**. Every event in your life has been shaping you, drawing you, pushing you towards that Greatest of all days **when the God-groom will come for his bride - for you**. The day will come, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, I don't know when, but sooner than you think. Then you will see him. Then you will understand – **he's your destiny, he's your life, he's your love**; this is what you were made for. The Bible closes with this promise...

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Those who were watching for his return responded with these words...

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Rev 22:20

Story: My dog Cailey... A four year old Brittany Spaniel – she really loves me! We only have one rule for her: no getting up on the couches in the back room. When we leave the house, she can watch us go through the picture window. There is a large fence around our property that I built. It has a large spring loaded gate at the back that slams when you go through it. Sometimes I peek through the slats of the gate to see what my dog will do. Sometimes she watches me leave, then turns and goes over and gets up on the couch. She can't see me, but I can see her. Whenever I come back, she can hear the gate slam as I come through it. If she has been on the couch, here's what she does. She looks out the back window, sees me, puts her ears down, and goes straight to her mat in the closet. Now if she has not been up on the couch, she does something different when she hears the gate. Her ears go up, she runs to the back window, wagging her tail, eager to see me. **It all depends on what she was doing when I was away.**

Jesus is coming back. It will be sudden... and surprising... and significant beyond your wildest dreams. You do not want to be ashamed when he returns. You do not want to be unprepared. You want to be ready. Ready to go home.

Because on that greatest day, friends, the shadows will pass, and LIFE will begin.