

First Sunday of Advent – 30th November 2025

Isaiah 2:1-5 & Matthew 24:36-44

[Here is a link to the YouTube recording of the sermon -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zuWfBsEj98&t=57s>]

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Let me be the first to say, “Happy New Year!”. This isn’t in case I don’t see you between now and January, but because today, being Advent Sunday, is when the Church starts its new liturgical year.

As Revd Ed reminded us last week, we move from the Gospel of Luke (Year C) to the Gospel of Matthew (Year A). And what a Gospel passage to start with!

Whenever I read this passage, I’m reminded of a film that I watched back in the 1970s. Some of you may have watched it. It was an American evangelical Christian film, some might say it was a horror film, called *A Thief in the Night*. The film featured Larry Norman’s haunting song *I Wish We’d All Been Ready* to emphasize the terror of being left behind.

The story follows Patty Myers, a young woman who wakes to discover millions, including her Christian husband, have vanished in the Rapture. She realizes she has been “left behind” and must face the rise of a one-world government and the Mark of the Beast.

Can I say that the film left its *mark* on me? (But not in the way of the film!) Thankfully, I’ve come to realise that the film’s fear-based approach to evangelism was based on a particular American evangelical view of that time. I’m pleased to say that most Bible commentators today have a different view on today’s passage.

One contemporary commentator suggested a tease question – **Do you want to be left behind?**

Let’s turn to today’s passage from Matthew, a short section of text with some important ideas and images.

We can’t make proper sense of it without considering the context of the wider teaching of Jesus in chapters 24 and 25. Now isn’t the time to look at all of this, but just to point out that Jesus is answering a question that his disciples put to him (back in v3) in response to a question Jesus asked as they were departing the temple.

Jesus asked them, “You see all these, don’t you? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” His disciples ask Jesus, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Their question is in two parts. “Tell us, when will these things be,” relating to judgement on Jerusalem and the fall of the temple. Jesus’ prediction of the temple’s destruction was fulfilled in AD70 with the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Revd Tudor was very happy to comment on Luke’s version of this teaching of Jesus in his sermon two weeks ago; so I won’t repeat any of that now.

And, the second part, “... what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” that brings us to today’s passage. You may have noticed that the reading started with “but”. It’s a contrast with what Jesus has just said. He now turns to answer the second part of the disciple’s question – about his coming and the end of the age.

“But about that day ...” Jesus has referred to “that day” throughout Matthew’s Gospel, and it refers to the final coming of the kingdom of God. It is an important part of what Advent is about. Advent is about waiting—not with anxiety, but with hope. It’s about preparing our hearts for Christ’s second coming—not just his birth in Bethlehem (that we celebrate at Christmas) —but also his promised return.

The word Matthew uses for this return is *parousia*—a term that means more than coming. It speaks of presence: the Lord coming not only to appear, but to be among us, to reveal what’s hidden, and to bring all things to light.

That’s why Advent calls us to keep watch—not with fear, but with faith, ready to welcome the One who comes to dwell with us.

“But about that day and hour, no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, only the Father.” I don’t believe we should have any issue with Jesus not knowing, especially at this time just a few days before his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection.

In Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi he says (Phil. 2:6) that Christ Jesus, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” And whilst Jesus himself said (John 10:30) “I and the Father are one,” he also said (John 14:28), “The Father is greater than I.”

The point is, about that day, no one knows. Life will carry on pretty much as usual, as in the days of Noah, when people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, normal everyday living, right up to the day Noah entered the ark.

And we know what happened next, don’t we. When the rains came down, and the flood came up (ah, that’s a different Bible story, but you know what I mean. When the rains came down and the floods came up) the people were taken away, swept away in the flood. Meanwhile, Noah and his family remained safe in the ark until after the floods, and they stayed behind to repopulate the earth.

Now, some of you may have heard teaching that being ‘left behind’ is a terrible fate. But notice how Jesus compares it to Noah’s day: those who were *taken* by the flood perished, while those who were *left* lived. Matthew’s imagery follows that same pattern. In this passage, being left behind is actually good news.

On this basis, **I want to be left behind, and you should too.**

To reinforce the idea that this will be unexpectedness of his return event, Jesus gives two examples of people going about their everyday tasks. Two men are working in a field; one is taken, the other left. Two women work their hand mill—one normally operated by two women squatting opposite each other with the mill between them, each woman in turn pulling the stone around 180 degrees. The two are likely to be sisters, or mother and daughter, or two household slaves. Yet no matter how close their relationship, at his coming one is taken, the other left. Imagine how startling that would be!

Finally, in today's passage, Jesus is urging his disciples to "Keep awake (or watch)" (v42); it's not mere encouragement, like: "It would be good if you stayed awake," but rather a command, "You must stay awake." But not an onerous command, as if we're expected to stay awake 24/7. Jesus Christ is coming back! This promise anchors our hope in God's faithfulness. Our hope isn't abstract or wishful thinking, our waiting isn't empty, it's expectant.

And Jesus uses the thief in the night image (v43). The thief arrives at an unknown time. This imagery isn't meant to make us anxious or afraid. The unknown day and hour remind us of God's sovereignty. The future is in God's hands, not ours.

Instead, Jesus wants us to be ready (v.44): A readiness that is not frantic or frenzied watchfulness, and not indulging in end-times speculation. But a steady faithfulness, faithfully living each day as his disciples, as he has called us to.

Let's pray.

My prayer is that Advent hope, which isn't just for Advent, will shape and guide our lives each day. As faithful followers of Christ, may we live out that hope with joy as we wait for and look forward to the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

James Parsons