

Communion service.

Matthew Chapter 24 : v.15-51.

Theme: Be ready for the second coming of Jesus.

¹⁵ “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), ¹⁶ “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁹ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.

²³ “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe *it*. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand.

²⁶ “Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; *or* ‘Look, *He is* in the inner rooms!’ do not believe *it*. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ²⁸ For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

³² “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. ³³ So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! ³⁴ Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

³⁶ “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷ But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

⁴⁵ “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶ Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. ⁴⁷ Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸ But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ ⁴⁹ and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹ and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of “**Advent**”. This is when we start our preparations to celebrate the first coming of Jesus.

Jesus never told us to celebrate His first coming, but it is O.K. to do so.

It provides us an opportunity to present the Gospel.

However Jesus did tell us to **remember His death** and all that it achieved to save mankind from the punishment of their sins.

This is the reason we have a regular Communion service.

In our passage today we are challenged to be ready for the second coming of Jesus.
We are also taught about the severity of the tribulation period before His second coming.
Finally we are encouraged by the “Rapture” of the believers prior to the awful events of the tribulation.
So today I bring you very good news, and a challenge to believers to serve Jesus, and not to be distracted by things that might prevent your service for Jesus.

The passage contains several important teaching elements.

1. The tribulation period. Chapter 24: v.15-26
2. The sudden return of Jesus v. 29-31.
3. The final Generation v.32-35.
4. The encouragement of the rapture v. 36-42.
5. The challenge to believers v.43-51.

There isn't time to go into great detail about the contents of this passage because this is our Communion service. However there is enough here to meditate on them.

1. The Tribulation period. – v.15-26

v. 21 -22 in the N.L.T.

²¹For there will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again. ²²In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God's chosen ones.

v. 21 -22 in the N.K.J.

²¹For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²²And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

It is clear from these verses that the tribulation period is going to be so bad that it would be impossible to compare it with anything else.

The atomic bomb that was dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the second world war was a terrible event in the history of Japan.

However the tribulation period is going to be much worse and it will be a world-wide series of disasters. No country or persons will be unaffected.

Of course there have always been isolated terrible events all over the world in history. However the tribulation will be different.

Mankind and their sinful nature cause wars and genocide, but the tribulation is something that **God does Himself**, in order to judge the world, for its sinful behaviour.

We must never forget that the tribulation period is orchestrated and controlled by God.

There is no need to focus upon God's judgement today. We just need to be aware that the God of the Bible will one day bring judgement upon this earth before He returns in His glory.

2. The sudden return of Jesus – v. 29-31.

Jesus says very clearly that He will return “immediately” after the tribulation period.

v. 29-31 in the N.K.J.

²⁹“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This sudden return is going to be like lightning. **(v.27)**

It will be preceded by alarming events involving the sun, moon, and stars.

There is absolutely no chance that anybody living in the world is going to miss it.

Remember that God created this world, the sun, the moon and the stars.
and He also holds it all together.

Therefore when God is going to do the most dramatic thing since creation, He is quite capable of darkening the sun and not allowing the moon to give its light and throwing down a few stars to get people's attention.

The whole earth will mourn, not surprisingly, and then the Angels will announce with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather all believers together wherever they are!

3. The final generation – v. 32-35.

These verses are really important. The reason is that it puts the second coming of Jesus and the tribulation into the context of one generation.

It starts with the parable from the fig tree.

The parable tells us that when a fig tree starts to grow leaves then the Summer is not far away.

I have owned a fig tree and I know how quickly the leaves grow.

Jesus is saying that when all of the things that He has spoken about start to happen in their intensity, then His second coming is not far away.

In v. 34 Jesus is clear that all of these happenings will happen in one generation.

This means it will be a 25-30 year period.

Lots of Christians believe in a 7 year period of intense tribulation.

Although the intense tribulation may well cover a 7 year period, Jesus is clear that everything will be concluded in one generation.

With what is happening in the world today, my grandchildren may well be that generation.

I don't know and not even Jesus knows when He is coming back.

However what I do know is that stage is being set for the most dramatic thing in history to happen when God decides it will happen.

4. The encouragement of the rapture. – v. 36-41.(& v. 30-31)

v. 30 -31 & 40-41 in N.K.J.

³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

⁴⁰ Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two *women* will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

These verses form the foundation of most Christian thinking on the rapture of the Church, prior to or during the tribulation.

First of all we need to examine these verses and then try and discover other verses in the Bible that support this event.

We are told that one day there will be two men in a field, one will be taken and one will be left.

We are also told that the same experience will happen for women.

Firstly we need to examine the context.

Jesus is talking about His second coming and has just reminded his hearers about Noah and the world-wide flood.

The people did not know about God's judgement until the flood came.

So therefore if one person will be taken into Heaven or raptured as we say, and one person will be left behind, then the person left behind is going to experience God's judgement. That is clear from the context!

Exactly when and how is debatable.

Nevertheless, Jesus says that He is going to gather His elect believers at some time with the help of all the Angels.

The following verses support this teaching ;

Revelation Chapter 3: v. 10 –in N.K.J.

¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

John 14: v.3 –in the N.K.J.

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.

Daniel Chapter 12: v.1 – 2 in the N.K.J.

“At that time Michael shall stand up,
The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people;
And there shall be a time of trouble,
Such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time.

And at that time your people shall be delivered,
Every one who is found written in the book.

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.

1 Thessalonians 4: v. 16-18 in N.K.J.

¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Whatever you make of the teaching about the Rapture, it is clear that at some time in the future, God will gather all his people into one place, and they will be saved from the tribulation.

Praise God for this.

However what is important is what we do **today**, and in our **own personal future with Jesus.**

5. The Challenge to the believers who are alive today – v. 42-51.

The most important part of our passage today is actually what we do in the here and now as we **prepare for the second coming of Jesus.**

Jesus gives us several challenges.

a) **Watch & Be ready** – Jesus will come at any time. – v.42-44.

What does it mean to watch and be ready?

Well Jesus relates the watching **to enemy activity.**

He says that if you keep guard on your house and you know that a thief is coming, you would be ready for him!

Many years ago at Christmas a film came out called **“Home Alone.”**

I am sure everybody has seen it.

The boy in the story was left at home accidentally while his parents went to another city to celebrate Christmas.

Some thieves tried to break in and steal the goods in the house.

However the little boy was watching and waiting with lots of tricks and traps to stop the robbers. It is still a great film to watch at Christmas!

If we want to be ready for the return of Jesus, we must be aware of the fact that the devil will try and steal things from us.

He will try and steal **our Joy**, steal our **identity in Jesus**, **divide Churches**, **divide Christian families**, **divide Christian husbands and wives**, and many more other things.

The way to deal with him is to resist him. Then he will flee and run away.

James Chapter 4: v. 7 in N.K.J.

⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Always honour God and His word in your life.

Look for **His deep peace** in all that you do and say.

- b) **Be a faithful servant for Jesus**, here and now. – v. 45-51.

Q. What does it mean to be a faithful servant for Jesus?

It means not giving up in your ministry for Jesus .

Jesus may lead you to another ministry in another place, but you never give up serving Jesus.

Hugh Brown said and Brad quoted Hugh Brown last week when he said that “every Church member should be a disciple.”

One of the biggest problems in the Church today is that we don’t seem to have many true disciples of Jesus, in the way that Jesus taught discipleship should be.

Mark 8: v. 34-35 in N.K.J.

³⁴ When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.

Lots of Christians don’t realise that **“to give up your life”** means to give up your **“Flesh life”**. This is the life that you live in our **own sinful nature**.

It is the life that says, **it’s all about me and what I want.**

The biggest danger for people who profess to follow Jesus is that they make their own decisions without hearing clearly from God’s word and therefore are **not really following Jesus**. They are **following their own thoughts and desires**.

Many of those thoughts can be **influenced by books, written by people**, and **not the Bible, written by God**. Be sure to make the Bible your guide, and to surrender your flesh life to God for cleansing and filling with His Holy Spirit.

- c) **There are future rewards for serving Jesus now**. v. 47.

Jesus always provides for the needs of His servants, but He will also provide rewards in the future for His disciples.

- d) **Make sure of your place in Heaven. Hell is a terrible place**. – v.51.

There is a challenge in v. 51 for **“Hypocrites.”**

Q. What is a “Hypocrite?”

A Hypocrite is somebody who says one thing, but in their own life-style they do the opposite.

In other words if a Christian is not behaving in a way that is glorifying to God, then they are a **“Hypocrite.”**

Christian Salvation does not depend upon life-style, but people who are born again by God’s Holy Spirit, can have their life-style changed if they are willing to **co-operate with God’s Holy Spirit**.

Jesus has plenty of **“Grace”** for those disciples who **want to change**, but He has no time for the **“Hypocrites.”**

Make sure that you are not one of the **“Hypocrites”** by surrendering your life to Jesus and asking for His Holy Spirit to change you to be more like Jesus!