

## Theme: The coming of the Christ

This account of Christ's coming starts about 600 years BC with Jeremiah's prophesy. "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah", in other words to the United Kingdom, and the promise was, in a nutshell, that the house of David would reign for ever.

And verse 15 reads, "In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David". But the branch will not be like king David an earthly king, he will be righteous a mighty king who, as we have heard, will reign for ever. Here also in verse 15 is a prophesy that there is life after death when Jeremiah said, "I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David." The image is that of a dead tree from which a new branch is to spring up. But in this image the branch is no ordinary branch, feebly attempting to preserve the last remnant of the once large tree. This is a 'righteous Branch,' one who will fulfil or execute justice and righteousness. This branch, an offspring from David, will become a mighty king in his own right" who we will call Christ. And finally verse 16 of Jeremiah reads, "In those days", which applies to us, "Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety,"

In revelation chapter 11 verse 15 we read, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever". It is in this kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah that we will live in safety. It was people like Jeremiah 600 years BC, who gave hope to a people who were under continual siege, and who prepared them for the coming to earth of God's Messiah our saviour of whom many recognised and embraced, but who many rejected, which sadly is still true today.

As Jeremiah prepared the people for the coming of Christ, so Jesus now prepares the disciples, which includes us, for his second coming as recorded in Luke chapter 21 verses 25 to 26, where we heard, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken." The Greek word translated as 'fear' can also mean 'die'. Then in verse 27 Jesus said, "Then they will see the Son of Man, coming in a cloud". Jesus had many titles such as the Messiah, and the Christ, but Jesus always preferred to call himself the Son of Man, probably because it was less provocative to the Jewish authorities, and he didn't want them to take action against him prematurely.

We live in what is called the in between time, that is, between the first and second coming of Christ, and despite what people say, no one but God knows the date or time of the second coming, but what we do know is that we should live as if his second coming was to be tomorrow, because as Jesus said at the end of verse 28, "because your redemption is drawing near". Redemption involves bringing liberty to a captive, usually through a ransom payment, the payment required to secure the redemption. The New Testament presents Jesus' death on the cross as a redemptive act for humanity, and as St Mark said, "And to give his life as a ransom for many".

Jesus has just concluded portraying great cosmic turmoil with people fainting and probably dying from fear, now he shifts to an image much closer to home an image from nature that they can more easily relate to. In verses 29-31, Jesus told them a parable”. “Look at the fig tree and all the trees, as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near”. “So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”

The coming of the kingdom of God is something that we should anticipate with joy rather than fear, so perhaps those who fainted or died as a result of Jesus’ second coming had good reason to be afraid, don’t let us be in the same situation.

Jesus taught us to pray, “May your Kingdom come.” (Luke chapter 11 verse 2) That’s a prayer for Jesus to come again so that he might fully establish the Godly kingdom that is only a partial reality in our world today. The coming of the kingdom will be a time when wrongs will be made right, and God’s people will be redeemed from the things that cause them suffering. The coming of the kingdom, however, will be a turbulent time.

In verse 32 Jesus says, “Truly I tell you,” “this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.” That statement is problematic as we have it because Luke wrote that probably after Jesus and hundreds of other people had already died. So, he could already see that that statement as we have it isn’t quite right, and indeed in Mark’s gospel and in Matthew’s gospel Jesus ends by saying, “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” And that statement about the angels, the Son, and the Father in Matthew and Mark’s gospels, for me reiterates what I have come to believe, and that is, that God in heaven was, and still is, in charge of his creation and always will be, so don’t let us worry about when the end time will be, just let us be ready and prepared for it.

Verse 33 says that heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away, and indeed we still have them over two thousand years later, and they are well established for another two thousand years and more.

Verse 34 says, “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life”. Dissipation from my Oxford dictionary means intemperate, dissolute, or debauched living, wasteful expenditure, or frivolous amusement, and of course drunkenness has very similar echoes. The third thing to be wary of is worry, or fear, and worry or fear is probably more prevalent than drunkenness. Worry or fear is the opposite to faith, the people who fainted or died at the beginning of our reading lacked faith and when they saw Jesus coming they recognised him and were terrified and fainted or died because they knew that they were not ready.

Verse 34 continues, “And that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap”. Jesus has instructed us regarding the signs for which we are to watch out for, and has told us the meaning of those signs, now he warns us to keep ourselves ready and verse 35 warns us that everyone living on the face of the earth will have to stand before the Son of Man. The second coming will be a time of great joy for those who are prepared and ready, but waiting can be deadly dull, however, lack of readiness will lead to disaster, and we should live as if his second coming was to be tomorrow.

And verse 36 reiterates, “be alert at all times, praying that you will have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and stand before the Son of Man.” We need to take notice of his language here when he says, “will take place”, there is no ‘may be’ about it.

I don’t know how you feel having heard or read this sermon, but when I was writing it there were times when I felt a bit depressed because of my sins, and despite what I’ve said I feared that I may not be ready, which made me think about Jesus and how he sees me and of course the way he sees all of us. Now what I am about to say in no way contradicts what Jesus said, but on reflection, I am of the view that Jesus’ objective is to save as many people as he can, and not to condemn as many people as he can, indeed, all four gospels are full of Jesus forgiving people because he loves us so much; and finally, he went so far as to give his life for us on the cross.

So let us look at what St John wrote as recorded in his first letter at chapter 1 verse 8, and which may give us a broader understanding. St John wrote, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Now regarding sin, I think one of the questions for us is, did we want to sin, do we care whether we sin or not. If we wanted to sin or indeed if we don’t even care whether we sin or not, then we are not ready. We are not ready, because we have no faith in or relationship with Christ, because if we had faith in Christ we would be ashamed of what we did, we would care very much what Jesus thinks of us and about our sin, and we would be trying desperately not to sin again, and we would fail yet again, and we would repent yet again, but our hearts would be with Christ and his heart would be with us.

Christ knows our failings, our problems, he knows that none of us will ever be able to fully imitate Him despite all our efforts, but it will be our efforts that Christ will see, and he will love us for them, and when we stand before him it will be our faith and trust in him that he will judge us for, and for those of us who have faith in Christ he **will** find ready. So do not worry but have faith in Christ.

Revd John White