

## Living Ready – Advent 1.

Matthew 24.36-44 & Romans 13.11-14

December 2019

### Matthew 24.36-44 (ESV)

*No One Knows That Day and Hour*

<sup>36</sup>“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. <sup>37</sup>For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup>and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup>Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. <sup>41</sup>Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. <sup>42</sup>Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup>Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

### Romans 13:11-14 (ESV)

**11** Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. **12** The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. **13** Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. **14** But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Message

Living Ready

Jesus and Paul

### Intro:

Today is the first day of December. Whether you live in the dark and gloom of the northern hemisphere or the brightness of the southern hemisphere something happens in December and it has started! There is this sense of build-up and pace among believers and non-believers towards 25 December and the New Year.

The Christian Church laid the foundations for this with placing Christmas around midwinter and designating the four weeks beforehand as a season of preparation known as Advent. But then in and around this time Jewish communities celebrate Hanukkah, Hindus mark Diwali and people around here celebrate Sint Niklaas. Americans jump the gun with Thanksgiving. On top of this are those work-place parties and special outings, and we mustn't forget the Christmas markets! Have I left anything out?



Yes, and then, many of us want to do some of this in different parts of the world so that involves leaving to be with family in our lands of origin - usually someplace with sunshine to help us through the long winter. Then there are all those Christmas cards and new year's greetings to send out in time. Don't forget!

But wait!! On top of all that we have church services and extra services of carols along with outreaches with decorations and a tree as well! *How does all that make you feel?*

### Setting

My role in all this is to provide spiritual leadership so that you live this season as a Christian and not a Pagan. So on December 1<sup>st</sup>, I am going to speak about Advent in terms of what the scriptures said to us today. We will continue with this next week in our Advent All Age Service.

The readings and messages of recent weeks have covered the Gospel hope established by Jesus that he will come back to rule on the earth. Through his victory on the cross, his resurrection and ascension Jesus reigns as Lord over all the powers of evil and the fullness of God's creation. That has happened. It's done. The Lord reigns!



The promise he made and our living hope is that the Lord Jesus will come again to actively rule. On that day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Until that day evil and darkness resist and denies him. This will end with his second coming. So Christians pray *Maranatha!* Come Lord Jesus! That is an Advent prayer.

Until he comes to rule on earth we may know Jesus as Lord in our lives and in our homes and churches even if he is not acknowledged as Lord of the nation we live in or the world around us. Jesus is our Lord and we taste his rule in our lives as an appetizer for when he rules as Lord of all.

Thus we are people of hope. We can handle the darkness because the light is within us and a greater new age has been promised to us. The light of his day is coming.

That language reflects why Advent and Christmas are in the dark month of December in Europe when all creation seems to be asleep and our bodies may struggle with the cold and dark.

## Scripture

Jesus spoke about what our attitude is to be in this season of waiting before the day of his return:

Matthew 24:36-39  
 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

<sup>36</sup> "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. <sup>37</sup> For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

In the days of Noah before the floods came, people were doing all the normal things that people do without any sense of crisis or impending doom. There is this strong sense in people that if we simply carry on as normal, all will continue as normal. That seems to be a factor in climate change denial today as if no level of climate change can really affect what we consider normal. It's assumed that no matter what, all continue much the same.

So here is the weird situation in December 2019. The season of the church devoted to serious preparation for the return of Christ and the full lordship of Jesus on earth has been so flooded and overwhelmed with competing demands and frivolous distractions so that maintaining spiritual discipline is very difficult.

We are like people in the days of Noah, all the normal business of life is happening flat out as if nothing is to be expected and what we are used to, is how it will stay. God is considered far away and that is where he is expected to stay.

Jesus gives clear instruction for how we are to live in anticipation of his return. After comparing his return to a thief in the night he says:

<sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Jesus says: "You must be ready." We must be ready. Being ready for the Coming of Jesus is a Gospel imperative. It's a simple way of describing why we do what we do.

**Q:** So how do we do this?  
How do we stay spiritually focused when life seems set to remain so consistently normal?

**A:** With that question let's listen to St Paul:

*Romans 13:11-14*  
Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

**11** Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. **12** The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. **13** Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. **14** But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Paul paints this period between the Ascension of Jesus and his return as a dark night where we live in anticipation of the dawn.

Even in today's world with all the artificial lighting we have, sinful behavior still flourishes in the dark. Whenever I read the local Brabant news the night before is a collection of crime stories and accident reports. Violence and sin flourish in the night.

Paul says that we as people of the light with Jesus already ruling as our personal Lord can see the darkness but are to live in anticipation of the light. We are to await and anticipate the light of his coming day by living in the light now. That is a great way to live on the 'right side of history.'

Paul's brief listing of what happens in the night include: orgies and drunkenness, sexual immorality and sensuality, quarreling and jealousy.

He covers, the social, the sexual and the physical ways darkness is lived out. In the world of Paul and in our world today, these things are all legal and socially tolerated.

These things are all permitted and normal today, just as in the days of Noah. You can consume what you want, behave sexually as you want, and be as verbal as you want.

As people of the light in whom Jesus rules, we are to recognize that these are activities of the dark.

Yet I note, Paul is writing to a well established church in Rome.

“the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.”

You people are actually adapted to darkness and that is to be seen in your behavior. Without a hope for the dawn and the return of Christ in glory you slip into all these things as if that's all normal.

But understand, the dark night will not last forever so Paul calls believers doing these works of darkness to cast off works of darkness now.

In casting these off we are to:

“put on the armor of light.”

and

“put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

This involves simple repentance

## Message and Application

So to bring this together here and now: December 2019 is set up to be a month of business leading to a celebration of Christmas with or without Jesus. We as Christians can easily get caught up in that and miss the point of December as Advent and Christmas as celebrating the light of God come in Christ.

Scripture teaches that in the dark space between Christ's first and second coming we are to cast off lifestyles of darkness and put on Christ, living in his light.

This is a season to cast off dark, fleshy compromise and sin that has become normal for the dark.

I could leave it as this general message but unlike Paul I am not writing a letter from a great distance away without close contact. I am part of the local reality in this congregation.

So I ask the question, if we were to 'cast off works of darkness and put on the armor of light' as our preparation for the celebration of Christ's first coming and active preparation for his second coming, what would that look like?

As pastor I am very aware that there are private sins and public sins. I am aware that as in the days of Noah they all begin to feel normal to people asleep in the dark.

The sin listed by Paul that I can see among us at times is 'quarreling and jealousy'.

**Q** How do I know this?

**A** Some of us cannot or will not talk to each other.

That is an outcome of quarreling and jealousy. This has become normal in some quarters.

There may be other works of darkness going on as if Jesus is never coming back and darkness is normal but I cannot call them out. We do have some 'quarreling and jealousy'.

So here is the situation:

Jesus has come and is coming back. The month of December is full of events, sacred and secular, intended to mark and celebrate this.

Meanwhile Jesus himself and scripture more widely, tell us to be ready for the light in full glare.

The *Maranatha* people are to be people who cast off sin in all its forms and take on Christ in light.

All those Christmassy December events are pointless if we are not actually getting ready for the rule of Jesus and his coming day as we should. Without the desired fruit these are detestable to God as false worship and unholy festivals.

So in line with Jesus and St Paul I am calling for some repentance here.

Where 'quarreling and jealousy' have become normal as if that will do forever until Jesus returns, this Advent, in the next four weeks I call you to cast it off.

Stop quarrelling and stop being jealous.

Exercise the repentance muscle and start to move in the opposite spirit.

- Instead of quarrelling, stop justifying yourself and grow in grace.
  - Extend grace and kindness.
- Instead of being jealous rejoice in the blessings of others.
- Instead of maintaining a grudge, break down the hostility and reach out to those you are estranged from.
- Instead of dividing the church up into friends and non-friends, resolve to live in love and peace with all.
- Receive each other as friends, brothers and sisters in the Lord.

“Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

You may never have been told this before but here it comes: This is the true work of Advent in the weeks before Christmas.

If you sidestep this work but still roll up to sing the carols and eat the cake, guess what? –

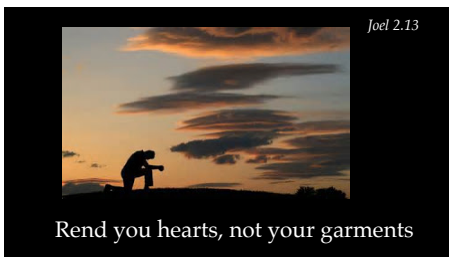
- This is disobedient and false worship.
- It falls short of what it is all about and can be hypocritical.

That is what we have four weeks for.

If you need help with this I would love to help.

If you don't want to do this then you need to ask what are you doing here?

- Christmas without Jesus is bad.
- Christmas ignoring Jesus is worse!



This is spiritual work God seeks.

The prophet Joel talking about repentance put it clearly for me (Joel 2.13)

...Rend your hearts and not your garments.

It is still Jewish tradition to show grief at a death by tearing clothes or at least a symbolic ribbon. The tearing that God seeks from us and what makes a difference is the tearing of our hearts over sin and its consequences. Casting off sin and the way it clings as if part of us can involve rending or tearing. This is what God seeks. This is what Advent in December is for.