

Are You Ready to Meet Your Maker?

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks, Ruth, for reading. My name is Martin Ayers. I'm the senior pastor here at St. Silas. If I've not met you, it's great to have you here.

Or if you're watching from home, then we're so glad you could join us as we gather virtually as well as physically here. Things are a little bit different today in terms of the timings of our services.

But from next week, it goes back to the normal pattern we've established over the past six weeks or so. And just to clarify for people, because our 1115 service is full today and has been full the last few weeks.

But the way it works is that the service we mark as having children's ministry has the same sermon as this service. So next Sunday, that's at 9.30 a.m. It's actually today, it's at 4 p.m.

But next Sunday and the next few Sundays, it's at 9.30 a.m. So if you wanted a book to come at the 1115, but you find that it's already full, just come at the 9.30. You don't have to have children to come.

[1 : 0 1] There is children's ministry going on in the hall. And today, actually, for the first time, we've got a creche as well. So if you've got children, bring them to that service for children's ministry.

But if you haven't got them, it's the same sermon in here. It's a slightly curtailed service just to keep timing right. But that's how things work. And if at the moment it's not appropriate for you to come because of personal health issues, obviously that's fine.

We're continuing to live stream this service and the evening service. So now that I hopefully have clarified that, we're going to turn to God's Word again. It's Luke 17.

As Ruth said, if you're here, it's on the sheets. If you're at home, hopefully you can grab a Bible or just look online at biblegateway.com. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to His Word.

Let's pray together. Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word of truth. Give us, we pray, open ears to hear your voice.

[2 : 0 2] Heads that can understand what you're saying. And hearts willing to change and follow you. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what on earth is going to happen?

Lots of us have been asking that question recently, haven't we? We're asking it now that President Trump is in hospital. A year ago, looking ahead into this year, I guess none of us would have predicted where we'd be at the moment.

And then in the summer, we had the green shoots of recovery after lockdown. And then we had eat out to help out. But now everything seems to be going in the wrong direction again.

And we might be asking, what on earth does the future hold? What is going to happen? How do I prepare for such an uncertain future? Some of us might be asking that about a business that we run or we work in and things are very uncertain.

Perhaps you're working in the university and things are very uncertain. Or in a hospital, in healthcare, and things are changing all the time. For some of us, it might just be about holidays and can I travel and can I see family and friends?

[3 : 10] Maybe you're thinking about Christmas. Maybe you're just thinking about your social life and where it's gone with the restrictions. What is going to happen? And if we knew what was going to happen, we could prepare for it well now.

We could be ready. Well, no matter how much things are taking us by surprise this year, this morning we hear Jesus tell us what's still the most important thing we need to be aware is going to happen in the future.

He tells us because it's what we most need to know about the future. And whatever the surprises have been this year and might come next year, that doesn't change. That the single most important thing we need to be ready for is that Jesus is going to return.

It's the day of his return. And nothing that happens this year can change that. And he tells us about it so that each of us can ask the question, am I ready? Am I ready for that day?

So we're going to think about that day, looking at Jesus' words. And our first point, our main point really this morning, the day of the Lord is coming. And the first thing we see about it is that it's a longed-for day.

[4 : 21] We see that in verse 22. Just have a look. Jesus said to his disciples, the time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.

Now, the Son of Man is Jesus' name for himself. It comes from the prophet Daniel in the Old Testament centuries earlier who had a vision from God of this man given all authority from God, the Son of Man.

And he's speaking here of his followers after he's gone, longing for the days when he is with them. And whatever you think about Jesus, all of us feel something like that longing whenever we feel pain about the world that we're in.

A member of your family getting very sick, the job that you wanted and thought yourself into and then you didn't get. Whenever there's something wrong, the state of the world on the news, this horrible virus, the costly restrictions of the pandemic, we all dream of a better world.

It's not hard, is it, at the moment to think about the things that would make the world better. A world where there's no fear, there's no shame, there's no sickness, there's no suffering, there's no sadness.

[5 : 34] What a world that would be. But Jesus says more than that to his followers, he says, you'll long for the days of the Son of Man, for one of the days of the Son of Man.

And that's because when Jesus walked the earth, people were given a glimpse of that world that we long for. We saw it last week, earlier in this very same chapter, Jesus' ten men approaching him, staying at a distance because they had this horrible skin disease, leprosy, and Jesus sends them on their way and they're healed as they go.

And the works of Jesus make sense of a story about human history and about our world and where it's going. Around us, the dominant story about our world and about history and where everything's going is that history is going nowhere.

The universe is a closed system of cause and effect. That's the kind of dominant worldview all around us. And human life has emerged from cosmic, impersonal forces.

And so there's no real direction to history. Empires are going to rise, empires are going to fall, United States, China, it will go on. And then eventually, the human race will die out.

[6 : 45] And eventually, eventually, the sun will burn out. And the universe will cool. And time will become meaningless because there's no energy and movement. That's the kind of dominant view of the future around us.

But in the Bible, the creator God tells us a different story. That this isn't a meaningless closed system of cause and effect. That this is the story of God's kingdom.

And that God made a good world. And everything that's gone wrong in our world is because we've rejected God as king. And so we live in a world that's like occupied territory.

You might think of the Channel Islands in the Second World War. That's the part of the UK that was occupied by Nazi Germany. And it's remarkable to hear about what happened in Guernsey and Jersey.

That the Nazis came in and invaded. And the swastika flag was flown. And there was real hardship for years in Guernsey. As there was extreme poverty.

[7 : 51] And there was a curfew. And all sorts of restrictions. And people longing for news of progress in the conflict. But they weren't allowed to listen to radio. And then eventually rumors drifting in of progress from the Allies in the Second World War.

And then eventually this incredible day as the news broke in Jersey and Guernsey. That the Nazis had been defeated. And they were going to be liberated.

And life could go back to freedom again. The Bible explains that the reason we long for a better world now. The reason we can point to so much that's wrong.

Is because our whole world is occupied territory. It's enemy occupied right now. And it needs to be liberated. It needs to be brought under the rule and the blessing of God's appointed king.

And over centuries God had promised that he would send that king. That he would be God in himself. Come to rescue the world. And then people saw Jesus. And he was teaching the values of his new kingdom around him.

[8 : 55] And around him as he taught there was this compassion on people. And this power to put things right. So that the lame could walk. And the blind could see. And the dead were raised.

And that's why at the start of our reading. Verse 20 there. The Pharisees. They're the Bible people. They see Jesus. They hear the claims about him.

And they ask him. When is the kingdom of God going to come? But look at verse 20. Look at what he says to them. He says the coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed. Nor will people say here it is or there it is.

Because the kingdom of God is in your midst. So he's saying that while Jesus is with them. The king is there. And still today that's true for us. That though he's not physically here.

The kingdom is available to us. That through him any of us can become citizens of the kingdom of God. We can pledge our allegiance to him as the king.

[9 : 53] And put our faith in him. But the kingdom wasn't arriving fully and finally then. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die and to rise and to ascend.

And we're still waiting for him to come in glory and fully establish his kingdom. He tells his people to pray. Thy kingdom come. We're waiting for it. And so in these days whenever things go wrong.

Whenever we're aware of pain in our lives and in the world. It's right to think if only Jesus was here. If Jesus was here he could sort this out.

He would put things right. But Jesus says that while we're longing for his day. We mustn't get carried away by rumors about his coming. So that's the second thing about this day that's coming.

It's an unmistakable day. If you just pick things up at verse 23. Have a look. People will tell you. There he is. Or here he is.

[10 : 53] Do not go running after them. For the son of man in his day will be like lightning. Which flashes. And lights up the sky from one end to the other. A couple of years ago we were on holiday in the south of France.

And there was an electrical storm. There was a big heat wave in France. And then we were by the swimming pool one day. On this campsite. And you saw this. There was all this blue sky.

And then suddenly this massive cloud started coming across rapidly. And you could see that people gauging with this cloud. How long have we got? And then calling children out of the pool.

And gathering novels and sun cream and stuff into bags. And getting back there. And we were in our tent. And it was absolutely deafening thunder.

And the sky was black. And then there was this lightning lighting up the whole place. There was no missing that there was an electrical storm. You could not miss it. Jesus is saying here.

[11 : 52] When he comes. There will be no doubt that he has arrived. You do get these rumours today. Especially in our internet age. Where you can get that information anywhere.

Speculation. It's this guy. It's that guy. Or even that there are signs now. That are specific fulfilments of things. So he is about to come. He is coming now. Get ready.

And we mustn't get carried away by that. We mustn't ever think that we might miss it. By not being ready. No. Jesus is saying when he comes. It will be unmistakable.

But we can't predict it. And instead. Because we can't predict it. We are always to live as though it could be today. It could be imminent. So that's our next thing.

It's an unexpected day. And Jesus gives us two historical examples of that. That we can learn from. Of God acting like that in history. Look at verse 26.

[12 : 51] Just as it was in the days of Noah. So also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. And it's extraordinary. How many. As you look at human history. How many different groups in human history.

Have a flood narrative. That remembers that terrible event. Verse 27. People were eating. Drinking. Marrying. And being given in marriage. Up to the day Noah entered the ark.

Then the flood came. And destroyed them all. You can picture how foolish. Noah must have looked. As he started building his ark.

As he started gathering in materials. To build this big boat. In the desert. People mocking Noah. Mad Noah. And his stupid idea. And his boat. And then the rain started.

And it poured. And the floods came. And there was only one way of escape. It was to be on the ark. And then he speaks about Lot. Jesus.

[13 : 50] In verse 28. Jesus says. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating. And drinking. Buying and selling. Planting. And building.

But the day Lot left Sodom. Fire and sulfur rained down from heaven. And destroyed them all. Lot was living in Sodom. This city full of greed.

They didn't care for the poor. And full of immorality. And violent crime. And he's warned by an angel. To get out of the city. Because God's going to judge it. And you can imagine.

Again. Picture him. You know. In modern language. That would be Lot. You know. Packing up his belongings. Onto the roof rack of the car. And fitting everything he could in. And getting ready to drive away from the city.

And people mocking him. What a stupid idea. Come on Lot, mate. God's not going to judge us. That's something only naive backward people believe.

[14 : 45] That there's a God who would judge us. That would find objection in us. Not us. We're enlightened now. Enlightened people. We know God would never do that.

And then just as the rain came in Noah's day. Sodom was destroyed. With fire and sulfur. And today of course. Lots of us recoil. Don't we?

At the idea. That there's a God who will judge. The idea of God's judgment. We think. How could a good God. A loving God. Condemn people. But the Bible makes clear.

That God's judgment. Will come because he is good. It's because he is a God of goodness. That he will judge and condemn. And surely when we look at the world.

We see that some things are so clearly wrong. The only right response is to be angry. When we hear about human trafficking. Or we hear about PC Andrew Harper.

[15 : 43] That was in the news this year. Wasn't it? The trial of PC Andrew Harper. Who was newly married. And tried to stop a theft. And as he approached the car. And they drove off. Got entangled in the rope behind the car.

And was dragged for a couple of miles. And killed. And we long for justice. When that kind of thing happens. That was why the trial was in such big focus in the news.

Actually not to be angry. Is sometimes a mark that you just don't care. It's a bad thing. Not to be angry. At evil and wickedness and injustice. And that's a reflection in us of God's goodness.

That actually he has to bring a just judgment. And what Jesus emphasizes here. Is not that the people in Noah's time were especially wicked. Or that the people in Sodom were especially worse than us.

Do you notice? What he brings out about both those events. Both times. Is that people were just going about normal life. Verse 27. Eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage.

[16 : 45] Verse 28. Eating and drinking. Buying and selling. Planting and building. And then bang. The day of the Lord came. And he says in verse 30. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

You see what he's saying? People will just be getting on with normal life. They'll be mocking God's people for believing God's judgment will come. They'll be on Amazon doing their Christmas shopping.

They'll be lining up on Great Western Road outside Pisano's for pizza. They'll be watching the stock market to see how their ices are getting on. They'll be getting an extension on their home.

They'll be booking ski trips. They'll be learning Gaelic. They'll be writing essays. They'll be browsing Rightmove. And then bang. The Son of Man will come. And it will be unmistakable.

And it will be unavoidable. And it will be totally unexpected for people around us. That's what Jesus is saying. He couldn't be clearer could he? I don't think Jesus could have been clearer about the day coming.

[17 : 50] It's going to be totally unexpected. And the last thing we see about it is that it's a decisive day. Looking around us now, it's difficult to tell a lot of the time who is really in the kingdom of Jesus and who is not.

But look at verse 34. I tell you, on that night, two people will be in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding corn together.

One will be taken and the other left. And then the disciples ask, where, Lord? And he says, where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.

I think what he's saying there is it's going to be obvious. If you're in the Middle East and you're on a trek or something, and you see a vulture, and then you notice several vultures flying together in the air, you can be absolutely sure there's a dead being.

There's a dead carcass. That's what's drawing them in. It's unmistakable. And they've come to clear it away. And when the Son of Man comes, it will be obvious that judgment is upon us.

[19 : 00] It's going to happen. And the broader point is clear from the earlier verses, that on that day, there will be this great separation between the spiritually dead and any of us who've put our faith in Jesus.

It's decisive. And there will be some surprises on that day. For everyone who's put their faith in Jesus, the day of his return is going to be wonderful.

It's going to be a glorious day. And for everyone who isn't ready, who hasn't settled their accounts with God by coming to Jesus, it will be an awful day. It will be a dreadful day.

I remember when I became a Christian, my Christian friend, hearing I've become a Christian, and him surprising me with his reaction was, he said, it's another of my friends who won't have to have an awkward conversation with Jesus on the final day.

That was what was in his mind. That was what he was so relieved about in me becoming a Christian. Each of us is heading unavoidably towards that day when we meet Jesus.

[20 : 06] And it's up to us how we meet Jesus, whether we'll meet him as a judge, come to hold us to account for everything we've thought and said and done, or we meet him as a merciful saviour, come to redeem everyone who's waiting for him and restore us.

And the question Jesus asks you and me this morning is, are you ready? So the first point, the day of the Lord is coming. Secondly and more briefly, are you ready for the day?

We have to be ready because it's going to be unmistakable, unexpected, unavoidable, decisive. So what does it mean to be ready? Well, we're going to see more about that in the next couple of weeks, the next couple of sermons.

There's this block of teaching by Jesus about how to be ready. But I think we already see in this teaching today three ways that he urges us to be ready.

They're on the sheet there or on the screen. The first is keep your eyes open. That is, remember the words of verse 21 that Jesus said, the kingdom of God is in your midst.

[21 : 15] So when we look at Jesus, we see the kingdom of God. And that means that it's available. The kingdom is available. And the shock of these chapters, chapters 15 to 17 of Luke's gospel, is the kind of people who are allowed in to God's kingdom.

That it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what you've done, it doesn't matter what you've become. You can turn back to God through Jesus and he will give you grace. He will establish you and welcome you.

He welcomes sinners, foreigners, outsiders, anyone. Anyone. Even us. So that for any of us, the key question in our lives is what do you make of Jesus Christ?

How are you responding to him? And if you're not sure about that, to get ready for his return, you have to just keep your eyes open, keep looking at him.

Maybe you could come on the life course in November, come to that first evening, Monday the 2nd of November, or just get along to roots or to a growth group as we look at Jesus week by week.

[22 : 22] And if you're thinking about a day when you will meet Jesus and you're nervous about that, you're concerned for yourself, you're worried about that, then just speak to Jesus today about it and trust him and you don't have to be afraid.

He welcomes sinners if we'll repent. We just turn from the ways we've been living. We recognize we've been living as rebels because he's on his way to Jerusalem to die for you at this point in Luke's gospel.

Keep your eyes open. The second way to be ready is don't get distracted. That's what Jesus brings out about these days of Noah and the days of Lot. The people were distracted.

And there's just so much to get distracted by, isn't there? But he's saying here that the day could come any day. So there's no space to be on a spiritual holiday.

To think, I haven't got time right now, but I'll get around to it. I'll do some thinking about God when, when, and we just keep putting it off.

[23 : 28] I'm too busy. I'm distracted. I'm too busy trying to organize a wedding. I'm too busy buying a flat. I'm too busy trying to become a millionaire.

I'm too busy trying to bag a consultancy post. I'm too busy making sure I get a 2-1. Playing in my five-a-side league. Driving my kids around to do triathlon.

Or I just need some me time on a Sunday because the rest of my week's so busy. And sometimes, quite gradually, these distractions crowd out in our lives.

Any concern for that question? Where do I stand with Jesus? What do I think of him? And so we live as though Jesus isn't coming back. When you look at our diary and how it's filled and you look at our bank statements and how we're spending our money, it's not obvious that we believe Jesus is coming back.

We get distracted. And Jesus says, verse 33, whoever tries to keep their life will lose it. And whoever loses their life will preserve it.

[24 : 33] And I take it there that the trying to keep your life is that idea of trying to live your life now to make the most of this life in the way that the people around us are, if that's what you love and you build everything on, ultimately, you will lose your life.

It's about having a heart that's looking for the life to come. Willing to lay down our lives now for Jesus. Living our life now as though the world is passing away.

Just investing in the life to come to save it. So be ready. Don't be distracted. And thirdly, keep your eyes open. Don't be distracted. And thirdly, to be ready, don't look back.

And that comes in verse 32. Just have a look at that. Verse 32. One of the shortest verses in the Bible. Verse 32. Remember Lot's wife. In Genesis 19, you can read about it.

When Lot and his wife fled the city, having been warned that it would be destroyed, she looked back and she was turned into a pillar of salt. It wasn't the look that was bad.

[25 : 42] It was what it showed was going on in her heart. That as God's judgment fell on Sodom, Lot's wife's heart was still in Sodom. She loved the good things of this world without God and she loved them too much without God.

So that instead of having her eyes fixed on God's kingdom, longing for a future with God and his people, her heart longed for what she left behind. Even though she was married to a believer.

You see that? Even though she'd heard the warnings of coming judgment. And Jesus says, of all the people to remember, he could have said, remember so many other people, couldn't he?

And he says, remember Lot's wife. Remember her divided heart. And maybe each of us needs to ask ourselves, what would it be in my life that would be most in danger of making me look back?

That most makes my heart long for life without God. Life without his call to deny myself and take up my cross and follow him. We've all got hearts that are quite messed up.

[26 : 51] But there is an urgency in Jesus' teaching this morning to guard your heart. Guard it. Nurture in your heart a longing for the kingdom that he's going to bring so that nothing pulls your heart away from him.

So that if he comes back today or this week, we're ready. He finds you ready. Are you ready? Ready and waiting to be with him? Let's pray together.

Just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word. Lord, let's pray together. Let's pray together. Almighty and loving Heavenly Father, these are sobering words from Jesus and words that are quite far from our day-to-day lives right now and everything that's going on and yet so important.

Father, would you give us the eyes of faith to see these realities, to see the truth about the coming day? and I pray that for every one of us listening today online or here in the room that we would get ready for the return of Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I'm going to hand back to Rob. Amen.