

Advent- Mark 13:1-11

- Only five and a bit more weeks till Christmas.
 - Thought you'd all appreciate me reminding you of that.
 - Christmas is a pretty big thing in Australia.
 - It's also a pretty big thing for the church.
 - But that hasn't always been the case.
 - In the early church, Christmas,
 - The celebration of the birth of Christ,
 - Was barely recognised.
 - Easter was the most significant celebration.
 - The death and resurrection of Jesus was the most important event in church history,
 - And it's celebrated weekly in the communion service.
 - But what came next in significance wasn't Christmas,
 - But the second coming of Jesus.
 - Shortly we'll begin the season of Advent.
 - Advent is mistakenly thought of as the lead up to Christmas.
 - But it's not the lead up to Jesus' incarnation or first advent,
 - But rather a reminder that Jesus is coming back,
 - His second Advent,
 - And that return has great significance for this world as we know it,
 - And our life as disciples.
- At the beginning of Acts Luke tells how Jesus met with his first disciples for the last time,
- And then after telling them that they'd be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth,
- He ascended into heaven.
- While they were staring up into the sky,
- Two men dressed in white said to them;
- "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."
Acts 1:11
- If you were to look at the Lectionary readings from now till Christmas,
- You'll see how this idea of Jesus' return is emphasised.
- Next Sunday as we celebrate 'Christ The King',
- The Revelation reading says;
- "Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail." Revelation 1:7
- That's a direct allusion to those angels' words from Acts ch1,
- Which is really an explanation of the enigmatic words from Daniel 7,
- The Old Testament reading for next Sunday;
- "I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed."
Daniel 7:13-14
- The reading for the first Sunday in Advent comes from Luke 21.
- Like today's gospel reading,
- The disciples were admiring the beauty of the Temple,
- But were rather taken aback when Jesus said;
- "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." Luke 21:6
- When they asked what will be the sign that this is about to take place,
- Jesus answered;

“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. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.” Luke 21:25-27

-What Luke describes is similar to what Mark writes in the remainder of ch13.

-Now what goes through your mind when you hear the word ‘apocalypse’?

-Mine always add ‘Now’,

-And thinks of the disturbing 70s Francis Ford Coppola movie ‘Apocalypse Now’.

-This chapter of Mark is commonly known as the ‘mini-Apocalypse’.

-But the Greek word ‘apocalypse’ simply means to reveal, unveil or uncover.

-The title of the Book of Revelation comes from its first sentence which is literally,

-The apocalypse of Jesus Christ,

-The revelation of Jesus Christ.

-A common misunderstanding of the Book of Revelation is that its wild symbolism,

-Obscures or hides its meaning.

-But the first Christians knew exactly what John was meaning as they read his vision.

-The hostile Romans may not have had a clue,

-But everything John wrote was perfectly clear to the early church.

-And the clear message was that although Jesus was put to death,

-In an act that looked like his plans and purposes for humanity were thwarted,

-His resurrection heralded victory not defeat,

-And one day every eye in heaven and on earth would see the victorious reign of Christ,

-Come upon the earth when he returned in glory.

-The pagan nations that war against God’s people will themselves face ultimate defeat.

-But,

-That final victory was still away off in the future.

-There would still be generations and generations of disciples of Jesus,

-Who would have to live in this world as pilgrims in a foreign land,

-As sojourners in a hostile world.

-And that’s the reason for Jesus’ warning to his disciple as they admire the giant stones of the Temple.

“Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” Mark 13:2

-Jesus’ statement would have been unbelievable to the disciples.

-We probably think of stones the size we have in buildings around Sydney,

-Stones that could be handled by a mason and his apprentice.

-But some of the stones the temple was built from would easily be twice the size of our communion table,

-Or as tall as this pulpit.

-They were massive.

-When we were in Jerusalem in June we walked around an area of the Temple mount,

-Where some of these huge blocks still lie scattered around,

-From when they were felled nearly two thousand years ago,

-Just as Jesus said they would.

-Obviously this revelation weighed silently on the disciples minds,

-Because it takes them till their sitting opposite the Temple looking back from the Mount of Olives,

-To ask the question;

“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” Mark 13:4

-What is it about the end of the world that gets people asking all these questions?

-Just out of interest I googled ‘end of the world’.

- Would you like to guess how many results Dr Google found?
- Three and a half billion!
- That's an article for every second person on earth!

-The very first result was an ad titled;

"Is the World Coming To An End? | Find Out In This Free Book"

- How could you resist a title like that?
- So I clicked on the link,
- Which of course means from now till the actual end of the world,
- I'll be bombarded by ads for freeze dried food and survivalist handbooks!!!
- Here's the opening paragraph;

"ALTHOUGH end-time events were going to be fulfilled between 2008 and 2012, this book explains why God has moved things forward by seven years. It reveals why God is now going to extend mercy to billions of people so that they can live into a new age that follows World War III."

https://www.prophecyagainst.com/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMIr6exk4bV3gIVFImPCh2_IA5sEAAYA_SAAEgL1FPD_BwE

-Now I could read you some more quotes from Ronald Weinland,

- 'A prophet and end-time apostle, who is proven of God',
- But I thought we should actually listen to God himself, v5;

"Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." Mark 13:5-8

-Can you see how Jesus' words are actually a rebuttal to Ronald Weinland's?

- He and so many other 'prophets' down through the ages,
- Have predicted when Jesus will return and the world come to an end.
- These so called prophecies often point to what?
- Wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines.
- Pestilence, plagues and problems so profound,
- Humanity will trip over the edge.
- But what does Jesus warn?
- 'Don't believe them!
- 'Don't be fooled!
- 'Don't be alarmed!

-Jesus gives even more details of the signs that will precede his return through the rest of ch13,

-And we'll dig more deeply in to those when we come back in a fortnight to Luke 21,

-But today let's stick with these first 11 verses,

-Because Jesus is telling his disciples and us today,

-What his future return will mean for the here and now.

-And notice it's the here and now Jesus is speaking to;

"When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. Mark 13:7

-We've been hearing of wars and rumours of wars for two millennia,

-And Jesus is still saying,

-'The end is yet to come'.

-It's at v9 however where Jesus gets personal;

"As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. ¹⁰ And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations." Mark 13:9-10

-The disciples probably couldn't believe that those giant stones of the Temple could be pulled down to the ground.

- But Jesus warns that they will be.
- And just as those stones will be torn down,
- So the antagonists of Christ and his kingdom will attempt the same on his disciples,
- They'll be torn down,
- Beaten and tossed out of the synagogues,
- Dragged before the courts.
- But that will provide opportunities for them to witness to Jesus,
- To announce to a sceptical and hostile world that Jesus indeed did die and rise again,
- And that he will come back as Lord to judge the world.
- This was the warning to the disciples that there'll be a price to pay as a disciple of Jesus;
 - "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ¹³ and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." Mark 13:12-13
- So what must we do?
- Endure!
- Persevere until the end of the age or the end of our life.
- That's what the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us to.

- Look on your Bulletin to that reading from Hebrews.
- At the beginning in v11 the writer tells us a bit about how the Jewish sacrificial system worked.
- The Jewish believer sinned,
- They took a sacrifice to give to the priest to offer in atonement,
- He made the sacrifice,
- The believer went home forgiven,
- But,
- Sinned again,
- And the process started all over.
- Sin, sacrifice, forgiveness,
- Sin, sacrifice, forgiveness,
- Sin, sacrifice, forgiveness.

- But Jesus made a once for all sacrifice,
- Himself.
- And if you remember the Easter story,
- At the moment Jesus died,
- The curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom.
- The Holy of Holies that symbolised the separation of sinful people from a holy God,
- Was torn apart so anybody could walk straight in to the presence of God.
- About forty years later in AD70,
- It was not only the curtain that was torn down,
- But the whole building.
- Sacrifices could no longer be made at all.
- A final reminder to the Jews and all humanity,
- That there's only one sacrifice needed for the forgiveness of sins,
- And Jesus has made it;
 - "Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:19-25

- Friends the Day is approaching.
- The Day of Jesus' return is getting closer.
- We still don't know when it may be,
- Because Jesus made it very clear that nobody knows that time,
- And when it arrives it will be like a thief in the night,
- Totally unexpected,
- But something we can prepare for.
- And its that preparation Hebrews reminds us of.
- We can't predict the hour or day,
- But we can be prepared.
- How?
- Lots of it is there in that Hebrews passage.
- Since we've been reconciled to God through Jesus's death and resurrection,
- We can go boldly into his presence through prayer, confession and worship.
- We can hold fast to the hope we have without wavering before the struggles and trials of this world.
- We can provoke one another to love and good deeds,
- And not neglect to meet together so we can encourage one another,
- That our faith is firmly placed in Jesus.
- Because it's as we do these things that we endure,
- And so stand firm to that day of our salvation when we see Jesus face to face.