

PREPARING FOR THE COMING KING

Today's Text: Isaiah Chaps 32-35; Matt. 24: 3-51

Extracts:

- 1. Behold a king will reign in righteousness [Is. 32: 1]... *Your eyes will see the King in His beauty... for the Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King. He will save us [Is. 33: 17, 22]***
- 2. 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. 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 [Matt. 24: 30-31]**

Towards the end of the 1990's, there was panic around the world over the Y2K problem. Y2K is an abbreviation for the year 2000. The fear was that computers that had been programmed to read six digits for date [two for day, two for month and two for year] might read 2000 as 1900. That could lead to miscalculations, malfunctions or even network shutdowns, with disastrous consequences for a computer-dependent world. The matter became of national and international importance and every TV programme gave prominence to a discussion of the problem. In April 1998, the United States Senate set up a Special Committee on the problem. It held 30 public hearings and received testimonies from over 150 witnesses.¹ January 1, 2000 came and went without any hitches, largely because most computers had become Y2K-compliant.

There is a bigger crisis looming in the horizon. It will affect all nations of the earth and all their citizens, irrespective of their religions and beliefs. When it comes, the sun and the moon will be darkened and the stars will fall down from the sky. They mark the return of Jesus Christ as King [Matt. 24: 29]. Have you heard about it on CNN or in any Congressional hearings? Is it on the agenda of the United Nations? No! Instead, there is a loud sound of silence.

In today's lesson, we shall focus on this crucial matter and give you suggestions on how to prepare for the coming King. It is a matter of life and death.

¹ "Investigating the Year 2000 Problem: The 100 Day Report," www.senate.gov/y2k/documents/100daysrpt/

1. What is the appropriate response to uncertainty?

There is the story of an employer who was desirous to make his workers happy with their pay. He decided to apply the cafeteria model. As you well know, a cafeteria lays out the food dishes and lets customers choose and pay for what they want. In like manner, the employer put a maximum monetary value on every job in his company and asked his employees to choose a combination of benefits that they wanted within the set limits. At the end of the exercise, he observed that the new (and younger) employees gave priority to basic pay, housing and transportation. The more experienced (and older) workers, on the other hand, chose pension and medical benefits and paid vacation.

Why were the younger workers not worried about retirement benefits? It is because they were *certain* of the retirement age which for them was still far away. Therefore, they could afford to *postpone* doing something about it. For the older workers, on the other hand, retirement was *imminent* and top priority. The story tells us that when people are dealing with certainty, they can prioritise, and push into the future things that are not urgent in the present.

With respect to the return of Jesus as King, we know that He will *surely come*, “but of that *day and hour* no one knows, not even the angels of heaven” but God the Father only [Matt. 24: 36]. So, what should be the appropriate response to such uncertainty? It is to be ready *at all times*. As the Boys’ Scouts would put it, “Be Prepared!” That is why Jesus Himself has warned us, “be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” [v. 44].

The early disciples knew of this sense of urgency and they adequately drew attention to His return in their epistles. For example, in a short epistle like 1 Thessalonians, Paul referred to it in every chapter [1 Thes. 1: 10; 2: 19; 3: 13; 4: 14-17; 5: 23]. Jesus Himself gave much prominence to His return and why we should be prepared so that we would not be caught off guard [Matt. Chaps 24 and 25]. Unfortunately, many people, including some believers are not quite convinced that Jesus will return, not to talk of soon. In order to address their skepticism, let us first see what prophets like Isaiah had said about the matter, and what has happened so far. If we can see a *trend*, then we had better get ready!

2. What did the prophets say of Christ’s Second Advent?

In numerous parts of the Old Testament, God spoke through prophets about the return of the Christ as King. He would first come in human form as the seed of the woman [Gen. 3: 15] and be born of a virgin [Is. 7: 14-15]. He would be both human [Gen. 12: 3; Is. 11: 1] and divine [Ps. 27: 11; Is. 9: 6; 25: 9; 40: 10; Jer. 23: 6; Mal. 3: 1]. His mission would be to lay legitimate claim to the throne of David [Jer. 33: 15-14-17]. Of course, a king has to be like his subjects. The King of Spain is a Spaniard; the Queen of England is English; and the King of

Swaziland is a Swazi. As heir to David's throne and the King of the earth, Jesus had to be human too.

The second thing that He would do, according to the prophets, was that He would set His subjects free from the bondage of sin and slavery which Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden had plunged humankind. It was prophesied that He would suffer and be crucified [Ps. 22: 14, 17; Is. 53]; that He would rise from the dead [Ps. 16: 8-10] and ascend to heaven [Ps. 16: 11; 24: 7; 118: 19]. He would return as King [Is. 9: 6-7; 66: 18; Dan. 7: 13-14].

In Isaiah, Chapters 32-35, we see the prophecy of how the Christ would rule in righteousness. Isaiah warned that the foolish and the miserly [Is. 32: 5], the immoral [vv. 9-11] and the treacherous [Is. 33: 1-2], among others would have no place in that kingdom unless they repented. The lawgiver and judge of that kingdom would be the Lord Himself and only He could save us [Is. 33: 22]. At the time of His final battle against the enemies of Israel and of His kingdom, "all the host of heaven shall be dissolved; and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down." It would be the "day of the Lord's vengeance" [Is. 34: 4, 8].

3. What has happened so far?

As prophesied, Jesus the Christ actually came in flesh two thousand years ago! When archangel Gabriel announced to a young virgin called Mary the conception and birth of Jesus, he told her [Lk 1: 31-33]:

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.

Just as foretold, Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. He made this point when He said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because *for this purpose I have been sent*" [Lk 4: 43]. In many of His discourses, He started with, "the Kingdom of heaven is like..." [E.g., Matt. 22]. The miracles of healing and feeding of multitudes were to demonstrate the blessings that citizens of the new kingdom could take for granted. The requirement to be born again underscores the need to become "naturalized" citizens of the new kingdom, just as we do on earth when we take on the citizenship of another country.

Before His suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus took great pains to explain to His disciples the significance and nature of His return as King. Among other things, He told them that:

- ❑ Only God the Father knew the day and hour of His return. Therefore, the uncertainty of His return called for *vigilance* [Matt. 24: 36, 42-44];
- ❑ His return would be a public act and everybody on earth would see it [v. 30].
- ❑ He is coming to judge *every individual* in the world; to reward the righteous with eternal life and the wicked with eternal condemnation [Matt. 25: 31-46]. Why would the judgment be based on works, not on grace, that is faith in Jesus Christ? [Gal. 2: 16]. There are a few possible explanations. The redeemed, who are believers in Christ, have been raptured and are already with Him in the air [1 Thes. 4: 15-17]. Therefore, they have escaped the post-tribulation judgment. A second possible explanation is that even believers need to maintain their justification by faith through living a sanctified life for “God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness” [1 Thes. 4: 7]. The works that Jesus listed (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoners, etc) are works of holiness by the justified. A third possible explanation is that the judgment will cover all the inhabitants of the earth, many of whom do not believe in Jesus. Since such non-believers think that they can go to heaven by their own merit (through their works), they will be judged according to works! Another possible explanation is that some people may repent during the tribulation and have the chance to be saved. Paul has made the point that there is no other foundation that we can lay other than Jesus Christ. However, “if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. *If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as by fire*” [1 Cor. 3: 11-15].
- ❑ There were leading indicators to suggest the imminence of His return. They include wars and rumours of wars [Matt. 24: 6], famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places [v. 7], persecution [v. 9], false prophets [v. 11] and lawlessness [v. 12]. Finally, the gospel will have been preached to all the nations of the earth [v. 14].

4. The King will soon return!

Just before His ascension to heaven, Jesus gave His disciples the sense of urgency concerning the kingdom. He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, they should go to all the corners of the earth to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He would be with them always “even to the end of the age” [Matt. 28: 18-20]. When the disciples asked Him whether He would restore the kingdom of Israel “at this time,” He replied, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” [Acts 1: 6-7]. The uncertainty was once again emphasized. As Jesus ascended into heaven and the disciples looked up,

two angels stood by them and said to them, “Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? *This same Jesus* who was taken up from you into heaven, *will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*” [vv. 10-11].

The Old Testament prophets said that the Christ would come among us in flesh. He did. The prophets said that He would suffer, die and resurrect. He did. They said that He would ascend into heaven. He did. They said that He would return as King and Judge. He will! What we do not know is when. As we had proposed earlier, the best preparation for uncertainty is to behave as if it would be soon, to be ever watchful.

With respect to His kingdom, Jesus used the Parable of the Ten Virgins to underline this point [Matt. 25: 1-13]. The young women came out to meet the bridegroom. The five foolish ones took lamps but no oil. The wise ones took both lamps and oil. The bridegroom delayed in coming. So, the young women fell asleep. Close to midnight, they heard a voice, saying, “behold the bridegroom is coming, go out and meet him.” As they trimmed their lamps, the foolish ones realized that they did not have oil in their lamps. They begged their colleagues for some but they refused in that they just had enough for themselves. While the foolish virgins went out to buy oil, the bridegroom came and the five wise virgins went in with him and the door was shut. When the foolish virgins returned and begged to be admitted, they were told, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.” The lesson of that parable, in the words of Jesus, is “watch, therefore, for you know not neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” [v. 13].

All the ten girls had lamps, symbolizing our outward show of religious piety. The oil is the Holy Spirit, as represented by the fruits of the Holy Spirit [Gal. 5: 22]. You may be serving on all the key committees of your church. You may be paying the highest tithe each month. You may go to Mass every morning and swallow every communion available. But if you do not have the Holy Spirit to guide your daily walk with Christ, you are behaving like the five foolish virgins. You are not preparing for the coming King.

5. How to prepare for the King’s return

The signs are troubling. Yes, there have been wars and rumours of wars all through history but they are getting more deadly. Look at Iraq? How about Afghanistan and Chechnya? Famines, pestilences and earthquakes in diverse places are claiming more lives. In one month alone, the Gulf Coast of the United States was devastated by two hurricanes, *Katrina* and *Rita*. After the *Tsunami* (2004), Asia has again been rocked by earthquakes in Pakistan and India, claiming thousands of lives. Human wickedness is reaching up to high heavens. There was a report recently that a woman tore open another woman’s womb to steal her unborn child! Even usually peaceful Trinidad & Tobago has experienced four bomb blasts in four months. Above all, with cable TV stations like TBN and

EWTN broadcasting worldwide, and the Bible in virtually every human language, the gospel has reached all the nations of the earth. The end is sooner than you think!

Happily most of us already have the lamp. We have received water baptism, go to church and participate somehow. Our preparation may just be adding some oil, the oil of the Holy Spirit.

Use the following checklist to test your preparedness for the King's return:

- ❑ *Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour? This is the equivalent of an oath of allegiance to your king. All it takes to do this is to get on your knees and speak to Jesus directly in your heart and on your lips [Rom. 10: 8-10];*
- ❑ *Do you strive to retain your salvation by leading a clean, Spirit-filled life? This is the equivalent of being a responsible citizen of His kingdom [Matt. 5: 48.] Feed your soul with the word of God everyday and practise what you read [Josh. 1: 8];*
- ❑ *Have you told others the Good News about the Kingdom? This is the equivalent of carrying your national flag everywhere and letting others know how great the kingdom is. You don't have to mount a pulpit to preach the word but by your words and deeds, you may be the only Bible that others are reading [2 Cor. 3: 1-3]*

If you can practise those simple acts, then you are prepared for His return. You do not need to worry about when He will return. If you die before He does, you will simply be part of His entourage from heaven. If you are still here when He comes, you are ready to meet Him in the air and always be with Him [1 Thes. 4: 15-16]. Both ways, you are a winner!