

# ADVENT and The Second Coming

## READING – Matthew chapter 25:1-13 NLT

*“Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The five who were foolish didn’t take enough oil for their lamps, <sup>4</sup> but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil. <sup>5</sup> When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.*

*<sup>6</sup> “At midnight they were roused by the shout, ‘Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!’*

*<sup>7</sup> “All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. <sup>8</sup> Then the five foolish ones asked the others, ‘Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.’*

*<sup>9</sup> “But the wise ones replied, ‘We don’t have enough oil for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.’*

*<sup>10</sup> “But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked. <sup>11</sup> Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, ‘Lord! Lord! Open the door for us!’*

*<sup>12</sup> “But he called back, ‘Believe me, I do not know you!’*

*<sup>13</sup> “So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return.*

## **SERMON**

Today is the second Sunday in Advent.

Advent with a small ‘a’ is a noun, defined in the dictionary as ‘arrival’ or ‘coming into existence’.

Advent with a capital 'A' is defined as the season of four weeks before Christmas in the Christmas calendar – that's according to the Collins dictionary anyway.

The arrival of, or coming into existence of Christ at Christmas, is what is most often preached about during this season of Advent - but that is not what I believe God has asked me to talk about today.

I am going to talk about 'Advent' as defined by both Strong's Bible Concordance and the on-line version of Nave's Topical Bible Concordance.

Nave defines 'Advent' as The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

One of the most well-known and popular Bible Concordances is 'Strong's Concordance' and on-line I noted from Strong's, that the Greek word translated Advent (which is 'parousia') is translated twice in the KJV as 'presence' but 22 times as 'coming'. The use of the word 'coming' is not in the sense of Jesus' birth, but and I quote from Strongs, 'the future visible return from heaven of Jesus, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God'.

Yes, it is right that the Church should preach the truth of Jesus' First Coming, how He was born in humble surroundings, to a virgin named Mary.

We know the story well - the news of His First Coming was announced by an angel of the Lord to both Mary and Joseph separately, and then at His birth, a multitude of the heavenly host announced the Good News, declaring that the new-born child would be the Saviour of the World - who was Christ the Lord, and He would save us from our sins.

The church must always teach people the reason for Jesus' first Advent. But over the 25 years that I have been a born again Christian, I have noticed a serious lack of preaching relating to Jesus' Second Coming.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven, are given to us as historical facts, to confirm the fulfilment of what the Old Testament prophets had prophesied about His First Coming.

But, from the moment that Jesus ascended into heaven, the nature of the rest of the New Testament changes.

After the events recorded in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the rest of the New Testament contains the letters of the Apostles, written to the Churches, instructing the believers about the need for confession and repentance of sin, and the importance and seriousness of living obedient and godly lives, not getting tangled up again in the things of the world (that is: SIN).

The Apostles had an important reason for teaching about living holy lives. They had their focus on an event that the Church today has almost swept aside as something that is so far removed from our sight that it isn't worth preaching about!

So, what is it that the Apostles had a laser-sharp focus on, that would cause them to be fixated on teaching the flock to live obedient and godly lives?

And the answer is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ – The Second Advent!

Scattered throughout the pages of the letters of the Apostles to the Churches, are a multitude of scriptures exhorting the believers to confess and repent of their sins and live godly lives... WHILST we wait for Jesus' Second Coming.

(You can take a look at 1 Peter chapter 4, 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 5, Ephesians chapters 4 and 5, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, much of 2 Timothy – the list really is almost endless)

Amongst these passages are Scriptures, warning the believers of what could happen if they do not forsake their sins. The passages confirm what Jesus HIMSELF preached in some of His parables, particularly the parable of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins (or Bridesmaids, depending on the translation), which Michele has just read to us.

The Apostles were so focused on Jesus' Second Coming that their Epistles were a reminding exhortation for followers of Christ to be constantly '**ready**' for Jesus' return.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the Bridegroom, and the Apostles' letters are serious instructions to believers (referred to as the Bride of Christ) on how to prepare ourselves and make ourselves ready for the sudden moment of His glorious appearing at His Second Coming, when he comes to take His Bride (the true Church), into heaven to be with Him forever.

As New Testament followers of Christ, the focus of the Church should primarily be on Jesus' Second Coming, whilst we also acknowledge and look back with

thanksgiving to God for His mercy towards us in sending His Son Jesus into the world over 2000 years ago, as the Saviour, of all who will believe in Him.

His death on the cross paid the price for all the sins of the whole human race, BUT, in order for us to receive salvation, we must FIRST believe that Jesus is the Messiah - the Saviour - and that He truly did pay the price for our sins through His death on the cross.

The enormity of this fact should then bring a conviction upon us of our sinful state in the eyes of our Holy God. This should cause us great godly sorrow, which will lead us to confess and repent of our sins, and cause us to desire to live our lives in obedience to God's Word.

And, yes, we will slip up from time to time, but we should not have a complacent attitude about it when we do slip up.

Living a daily life that is 'ready' for Jesus' return, means that we should quickly make amends for our slip ups, and put things right where we have hurt others, and confess our sin to God, repenting of it again, and asking for His forgiveness and His help to discipline ourselves in holy living.

Repentance is NOT a single act, which we publicly declare at our Baptism or Confirmation. Repentance is a daily, hourly, and even a 'minute-by-minute' act of our will, driven by our hunger and thirst to live godly lives whilst we wait for Jesus' Second Coming.

In 1 John 1:8-10, God's word says,

***"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***

***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***

It would seem that throughout the ages, the church has become weary of waiting for Jesus' return. By contrast, the letters of the Apostles indicate that they felt Jesus' Second Coming would occur at any moment! Hence the importance they placed on teaching and exhorting followers of Christ to live godly lives WHILST they waited for His return.

But as the centuries have gone by, and particularly in the last 25-30 years, it seems that the once-watchful Church has now fallen into a state of slumber. It's as if the Church feels that Jesus is NEVER going to come back, and

consequently much of the Church has stopped preaching about His Second Coming.

Perhaps their thinking is that people may feel that the Second Coming of Christ is just a fantasy made up by fanatical believers, and so they do not feel comfortable preaching about something that may be considered far-fetched. They may also be thinking that we have been waiting over 2000 years for Jesus to return, and everything on this earth has been carrying on the same all these years, with no indication of when He will return.

But this kind of thinking is actually foretold in the Bible in 2 Peter 3:3-4 where Peter said to the believers,

***‘Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.”’***

So, even in the early Church, people were thinking this! Surely there are believers today who will be thinking Jesus’ Second Coming will NEVER happen, so why bother preaching about it?!

Well, the reason the Church needs to preach it is because, not only the Apostles, but also Jesus HIMSELF teaches that His followers must be alert, ready, watchful, and waiting for His Second Coming! He talks about this in Matthew chapter 24, Mark 13, Luke 21 and Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

However, nowhere in the Bible does Jesus say when His Second Coming will be. On the contrary, in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus says that no one knows the day or the hour when His return will be (not even the angels). Only God the Father knows. But Jesus says it will come suddenly, like a thief in the night, when we are least expecting it.

If we knew when a thief was going to come, we would most definitely make sure that we were ready and waiting for his arrival!

In Mark 13:33, Jesus says that since we don’t know when His Second Coming will be, we must be on guard and stay alert.

But what specific things must we be watchful for and alert to, in relation to His Second Coming, if no one will have any idea when His return will be?

Well, Jesus doesn't leave us in the lurch where this is concerned! In the Gospels, Jesus says that there will be many signs on the earth that will fulfil prophecies that are written in the Bible, and these will be indicators of His impending return, and that believers must keep watch for these 'signs of the times'.

In Matthew 24 verse 33 and in the parallel passage in Mark 13 verse 29, Jesus says that these End Times signs will begin to escalate, and will even indicate when His return is 'at the door' as He puts it.

How wonderful that Jesus Himself would instruct His followers on how to live godly lives and how to keep watch for His return whilst we are waiting for it to happen!

But what are some of the signs that precede Jesus' return?

When Jesus told the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins who were waiting for their 'Bridegroom' to return for them, He was talking about the state of the Church whilst it waits for His Second Coming.

All ten virgins were waiting for their Bridegroom to return.

The bridegroom is Jesus, the virgins (or bridesmaids) were waiting for Jesus, the bridegroom, so since they knew He was coming they represent believers; Jesus' followers - people like you and me.

Five of them were 'on the ball' with their lamps topped up, ready and waiting for the sound of the trumpet and the shout: "Behold! The Bridegroom cometh!" so that they could jump up and eagerly run to meet Him.

The other five were half-hearted in their time of waiting, thinking that He was taking His time in returning, and so they didn't bother to keep their lamps topped up.

All ten virgins were asleep when the shout came that the Bridegroom was returning, but the five foolish ones were not ready because their lamps were almost running out of oil. Instead of being prepared and ready for His return, with enough oil in their lamps, at the very moment that the Bridegroom was returning, they were distracted by the task of having to go and find more oil.

Whilst they were gone, the Bridegroom returned and took with Him those who were READY for Him, and they entered into the Kingdom of heaven to partake of the marriage feast of the Lamb with His Bride....and the door was locked.

When the five foolish ones returned from buying their oil, they found the door locked, they began to knock, asking to be let in. They truly believed that they should be a part of the marriage feast with their Bridegroom. After all, they proclaimed to be followers of the Bridegroom, and they WERE waiting for His return, albeit NOT in a READY manner.

But what does Jesus do when he hears them knocking to be let in? He would NOT open the door to them, or let them in. In fact, he tells them to “Go away”. He says, “I do not know you”. Very soberly Jesus finishes this parable to His followers, with a warning to them, in the last verse of our reading today, saying,

***“So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return.”***

What we have just heard is a startling and shocking parable. Jesus is saying that at His Second Coming, half the Church will be ready and waiting for Him, and half will not be ready, because that half will have grown weary of the wait, will have a complacent attitude towards His return, and NOT be concerned about being ready, or keeping watch for the signs of the times that will indicate His approaching return.

Half of the Church will outwardly appear to be ‘followers of Christ’, but they will display a lack of interest regarding His return.

Jesus is exhorting such complacent followers to WAKE UP from their slumber, and He warns them of the eternal consequences of them remaining in this complacent state. If anyone here today is complacent about Jesus’ return, maybe He wants to warn you; because His heart’s desire is that all should repent while there is still time.

As you may well know, the Book of Revelation (the last book of the Bible) begins with Jesus’ messages to the churches, many of them being in a state of complacency and sin, which he warns them to repent of and Wake Up. Jesus then shows the disciple John, the revelation of the unfolding events of the End Times, prior to His Second Coming.

Since the moment that Jesus ascended into heaven, the world has been living, in what the Bible calls the End Times. The Apostles were well aware of this, as evidenced in all their letters to the early believers, written in the New Testament.

But many of the End Times events that Jesus warned about in the Gospels have been occurring more frequently over the past few decades, and especially in the last few years, where their frequency seems to have escalated at an alarming rate.

The News is awash with reports of death and destruction, and relentless catastrophes all around the globe. We are in the times mentioned in the Bible, where nations are in distress with perplexity. A time where some people's hearts are failing them for fear of what is coming upon the earth.

When we look around at the state of the world, with rampant lawlessness and violence incited by even the slightest offense, it seems that no one has any solution to the world problems. We witness earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and other bizarre weather patterns, droughts and famines, on a scale that is now regarded by the world as unprecedented.

All these things Jesus warned would be signs that would occur and escalate, indicating His imminent return. He says this in the Gospels: Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21...

A major sign of the coming of the Messiah was foretold to us by a number of the Old Testament prophets. The sign was that before Messiah returned to establish His Kingdom on earth, the scattered Jewish people would return to their homeland, Israel.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah and Obadiah prophesied about a future time when God would bring back His chosen scattered people (the Jews) to their homeland. Jeremiah tells us in chapter 23 that the time will be just before God sets up his Messiah as King.

Since the day that Israel was reborn as a nation in 1948, after 1800 years of being non-existent as a nation, and its people living in exile, scattered throughout the nations of the world; in recent years the exiled Jews have been returning to Israel in their thousands, and this number is escalating month by month from every corner of the globe. Not much is reported about this on the mainstream News (but we shouldn't be surprised, as many of us believe that much of the global media is biased against Israel); and so we have to obtain our information from credible Jewish sources on the internet.

Jesus also warns believers that many false prophets and false teachers will rise up during the End Times to deceive the Church into following their false doctrines, leading the flock away from the truth; and, my goodness are we living

in these times now! Much of the Church around the globe is sliding into great Apostasy, substituting the truth of sound Biblical doctrine with the lies of Satan, preaching things that please man's fleshly desires, but which are contrary to God's Holy Word; condoning sinful behaviour instead of confronting and dealing with it in accordance with God's Word.

This is why the apostles were so eager to exhort those early believers to be alert, watchful and ready at all times. But these words are for EVERY believer, right up to the moment of the Second Coming of Christ.

Almost 2000 years have gone by since Jesus ascended into heaven, and we read in Acts 1 verse 11 that whilst the believers were watching Him ascend, an angel of the Lord appeared and said to them,

***“Why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”***

One thing is for sure... God has NOT changed His mind on this! Jesus WILL return!

In conclusion, the primary purpose of the New Testament is to preach to **unbelievers** about Jesus' FIRST Advent, bringing Salvation to all who will believe in Him. But another important purpose of the New Testament is to preach and exhort believers to grasp hold of the seriousness of the need to be watchful and ready for the Second Advent.

It is at Jesus' Second Coming, when He will take His faithful and ready followers into Heaven, then hold the Last Judgement, bring in a new heaven and a new earth, defeat once and for all time the powers of darkness, and finally set up His eternal Kingdom in which there will be no sin, no evil, no pain, and no suffering.

As followers of the Bridegroom, we want to be so ready for His return that we will rise up and be gone to meet Jesus in the air, the moment we hear the shout, “Behold! The Bridegroom cometh!”

Paul put it this way in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 15 to 17:

***“We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and***

***remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.”***

**THIS** is the Advent that the first Churches were focused on. It would seem that many of our Churches today have fallen into a deep slumber concerning the Lord’s Second Advent, the Second Coming of Christ.

But may we as individual followers of Christ, fix our eyes on the truth and reality that Jesus WILL return, and that He has said that He will come suddenly, at any moment. Therefore, we must not live as if it **could not** happen in our lifetime, and worst still, that it will never happen at all.

It **is** going to happen - when we least expect it, and so by this statement of Jesus, it **COULD** happen in our lifetime! We should not dismiss this possibility simply because it hasn’t happened in the last 2000 years.

When it happens, we need to be living in readiness for it, so that we can be up and gone in the twinkling of an eye, to meet the Lord in the air, if we are alive at His appearing. But don’t forget the scripture I have just read to you, that even if we are dead when He returns, our mortal bodies will rise from the grave to meet Him in the air, the moment the trumpet is sounded and the shout is heard – a miracle and mystery indeed!

So, dear brothers and sisters, let us live our lives with a ‘Second Advent focus’ every day of our lives, not just at this specific time of the year.

As we noted at the beginning of this sermon, the Strong’s Concordance definition of ‘Advent’ or ‘Coming’ is “The future visible return from heaven of Jesus, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the Kingdom of God.”

Jesus’ last words in the Book of Revelation, the very last Book of the Bible, were, “I am coming soon!” And John, its author, concluded the Book of Revelation with these words... “Amen! Come Lord Jesus!”

May we all be ready for Him at His Glorious Appearing.

AMEN!