

"The Second Advent"

November 29, 2010

Matthew 24:36-44

Note: The title, "Son of Man" is a term for the Messiah used in OT. Jesus ascribed this title for himself. This text is about the Second Coming of our Lord.

Matthew 24:36-44:

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, 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 Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner 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. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

I'd like to share a small little message with you about a very large topic. I'd like to give a very clear talk about a mystery. I'd like to give a brief sermon on an eternal matter. I begin this way because I think it's helpful to remember that our faith is filled with paradox and

mystery, things we can never fully grasp this side of heaven. Our finite minds can only handle so much from the Infinite One. But God does give us a taste now and then of what is eternal, a holy communion with heavenly truth.

The Return of Christ is heavenly truth that most of us do not think a lot about during our earthly days. The file in my filing cabinet marked, "Second Coming" is a thin one. If you saw an ad in the newspaper about a pastor or theologian giving a lecture series on the Return of Christ, you would probably assume that it was a Pentecostal or Fundamentalist Church. But the season of Advent is not just about Christmas. It's not only about the First Advent of our Lord, his first appearance - it's also about his Second Advent, the Second Coming of our Lord.

The passage John read to you from Matthew 24 is the Gospel lesson from the Common Lectionary used in most churches throughout the world today - Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, and even UCCers are all studying this text.

"But as for that day and that hour - the hour of his return - no one knows - not even the angels, not even Christ himself. The Father sets that date.

"For just like it was during the days of Noah - people never expected a flood - so too will it be for the coming of the Son of Man."

"Keep awake, for the Son of Man is coming."

There are many lectionary texts about the 2nd coming: Luke 21: 25-36, Malachi 3:1-4, Zephaniah 3:14-20.

When I went off to seminary the first year had some predictable courses. We all took Old Testament 101 in the Fall semester, and New Testament 101 in the Spring. One of the things that was impressed upon us by the New Testament professors who team taught the introductory course was how central the Second Coming is in the New Testament. I always thought of it as a nice happy ending mentioned once or twice, something on the periphery of our faith. They pointed out that it's at the core of our faith, that it was central to the first Christians in their understanding of the person & work of Christ.

The Roman Catholic church honors that still today by including these words in every Mass: *Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will . . . come again!*

My professors pointed out how much time we spend on the Sermon on the Mount - Jesus' teachings recorded in 3 chapters of Matthew's gospel - Matthew 5, 6 & 7 -- but how little time we spend focusing on 7 other chapters in Matthew that deal predominantly with the Return of Christ - Matthew - ch. 12, 13, 16, 18, 22, 24 & 25.

The Apostle Paul also had the 2nd coming at the core of his proclamation of the Gospel.

I Thessalonians 4: *"For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet,*

will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Again and again my professors pointed out that the New Testament sees the Return of Christ as the culmination of his work, the coming of his kingdom, the fulfillment of his prayer, *"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."* They told us that in the New Testament there are over 300 references to the Return of Christ. Out of 27 New Testament books, 23 mention the Second Coming. This was shocking to me - to listen to Ivy League Professors in Tweed Sport Coats with patches on the elbows, talking about the 2nd coming.

But if something is so prominent in the New Testament then it deserves our attention as well, it deserves its place in our faith. The place it deserves is one of hope & focus. The return of Christ is the reason we can light the candle of hope today. It's why Christians are cautiously optimistic in the short term and resounding optimistic in the long run. Because one day as Revelation 11 puts it, *"The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever!"*

The classic illustration of this is the culminating events of WWII. D Day as you know was June 6, 1944. That was the decisive battle of the war. After D Day the tide had turned. In the weeks that followed the outcome became certain, it was just a matter of time. And yet the war was not

over in Europe until almost a year later. V-E (Europe) day was May 8, 1945. And V-J (Japan) day was not until Aug. of 1945. Much suffering & hardships and deaths occurred between D-Day and the Victory Days but the decisive battle had been fought and won by the Allies on the shores of Normandy.

Christians look at the life of Christ like D-Day. God landed upon our shores in Jesus of Bethlehem. His life, death and resurrection are our victory over sin and death and separation from God. Christ won the decisive battle over the Enemy on Easter Sunday. But much suffering, hardships, injustice still occurs in this world. Victory Day has not come yet. The Return of Christ will be the ultimate victory Day. As God's Kingdom comes to earth in all its fullness. *"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory!"*

He came the first time in humility.

He will come again in victory.

He came once to teach us about the kingdom of heaven.

He will come again to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth.

So, there within this doctrine of the Return of Christ there is this profound theme of hope.

Some of you gardeners will order seeds this winter. You'll sit in your home with freezing temperatures outside and snow on the ground and order seeds for your garden because you trust that Spring will come. Christians

plants seeds of hope in this world because we know one day Christ will come again and those seeds of righteousness, of justice, of equality, of abundance, of love will grow into all the glory of the Kingdom of God!

The Return of Christ makes us a confident, hope-filled people. It also gives us our focus - planting seeds of hope in a barren world.

A 3rd grade teacher had to leave her class alone for a bit to get something from the school office. She left them with a specific assignment to complete while she was out of the room. When she returned, she was disappointed to see that they had not completed the work at all. "What were you doing while I was gone?" "Well, Joey waited by the door. He kept peaking out to see when you were coming, and he'd give us reports. I guess we were so busy looking for your return that we forgot to do the work you gave us."

We don't want to be like that class - so busy trying to figure out the details and timing of the 2nd coming that we neglect to do the Master's work until he returns.

I once saw a church message board sign that read: *"Jesus is coming. Look Busy."* There's actually some good theology there. That's why Jesus says, *"Keep alert! Keep awake!"* A little further on in Matthew 24 he says, *"Blessed is the servant whom his master finds him at work when he returns."*

I'll close with the words to an old Negro Spiritual:

*"There's a king and captain high, and he's comin' by and by,
and he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.*

*You can hear his legions charging in the regions of the sky,
and he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.*

*There's a man they thrust aside, who was tortured till he died,
and he'll find me hoein' cotton when he comes.*

*He was hated and rejected, He was scorned and crucified,
and he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.*

When he comes! when he comes!

He'll be crowned by saints and angels when he comes.

*They'll be shoutin' out hosannas to the man that they denied,
and I'll kneel down in my cotton when he comes."*

Let's keep planting seeds of hope in this world.

For Christ has died. Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

Amen and Amen!