

## ***Jesus' Warning***

### Welcome

Hello and welcome to *Knowing You Jesus*... Today we are getting a bit apocalyptic. The end is nigh! We're all doomed....

Well, not exactly, so let's hear a couple of Bible readings and then think about them together...

The first is a lovely ancient vision of universal peace - it's quite the opposite of 'we're all doomed'.

### **Isaiah 2: 1 - 5**

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

2 In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.'

The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.

5 Come, descendants of Jacob,  
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Today's second reading is from a confusing chapter in Matthew where Jesus is recorded as saying all kinds of dramatic things about calamities and the end of time. It's sometimes given the grand title of the synoptic apocalypse. We hear a few verses that encourage us all to be ready, because we do not know the time when the Lord returns.

**Matthew 24: 36 - 44**

36 'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Last week we marked the end of the old church year. We accepted, and even welcomed, **darkness** as a fallow time, an opportunity to let go of what is over, dying and redundant.

Today marks the beginning of the new church calendar, as we consider the theme of Advent hope. If last week was about darkness, this week is about **light**.

*Within the darkest night God kindles a flame that never dies away!*

We can't bear perpetual darkness. We need light and hope. As we begin Advent we focus on the promised coming of Christ.

*Maranatha* is an Aramaic word used in 1 Corinthians 16:22.

It means something like *Come Lord Jesus!*

Or: *Our Lord, Come!*

Or, in the Message version, *Make Room for the Master!*

The word has been used as a mantra for Christian meditation. It's in the language that Jesus spoke and has four even syllables - ma ra na tha...

It's a dark world out there but *Maranatha! Christ is coming.*

Our short reading from Matthew 24 is set in a very confusing chapter of the gospel. It's probably a mixed bag of sayings about the future. Some of them refer to the relatively near future: the Fall of Jerusalem which happened in AD70. Some refer to a remote moment of cosmic collapse: the stars will fall from the sky. It's an uncertain passage in an uncertain world.

But there is a promise gleaming like a diamond in the midst of all the uncertainty.

**Christ will come again.** He'll be like lightning flashing across the sky and every eye will see him. With the invention of the internet, it's not so difficult to suppose that every eye - or virtually every eye - might see him when he returns.

So, we have a war in Europe, but *Maranatha! Christ is coming.*

We are experiencing a seriously unbalanced climate, but *Maranatha! Christ is coming.*

The cost of living crisis will bite hard, but *Maranatha! Christ is coming.*

The church faces challenges around finance and buildings, but *Maranatha! Christ is coming.*

Now Christ's coming can be thought of in three different ways.

1. He comes as we celebrate Christmas.
2. He comes into the life of the Christian.
3. He comes at the end of time.

When we say *Maranatha! Christ is coming*, we may be thinking of all three comings.

**At Christmas**, when, in the worship of the church we celebrate the incarnation - the coming of Christ as a baby in a manger - we **re-experience** the first coming of Christ.

Let your soul be absorbed by the joy of children in our nativity;  
soar in your spirit with the angels on Bethlehem's hillside as you sing the old carols in the carol service;  
feel the joyous, mystical moment of the midnight Christmas Eve communion, as we taste the Word made flesh!

We look forward to Christmas, when we really do have the opportunity to experience the first Christmas once more in our spiritual imagination.

This may not seem like much, but it is truly powerful. The worshipping Christian enters into the spiritual reality of all that God has done. We may kneel in the stable by the manger and sample the wonder of it all: into this hurting world with its inequality and bitterness and joy and laughter and grieving and tears and injustice and confusion - into this world - into our world - into the physical stuff of this world, Christ comes!

2022 has been a very challenging year, but *Maranatha! Christ is coming*. At Christmas time.

**And Christ comes again in the life of the believer.** In our daily lives we pray, come Lord Jesus, Maranatha! We are calling for our everyday lives to reflect the truth, grace and beauty of the life of Jesus.

Now the scripture tells us that if we come close to God, God will come close to us. So we can be sure that our prayer, *Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus into my life* will be answered.

But do we **really** want to pray it? What if we prefer to keep Jesus at arm's length? Do we sometimes love Jesus, but only as a fair-weather friend; only conditionally? We love him when things have gone well but are distant if we're having one of those days, and everything seems to be going wrong.

We often say that Jesus loves us unconditionally. Can we love God a little bit more like that?

In practice this means maintaining our poise at difficult moments.

Someone stole 'your' parking space? *Maranatha! Make room for the Master!*

Cold-shouldered by a family member? *Maranatha! Make room for the Master!*

Just got far too much work to do?

*Maranatha! Make room for the Master!*

Feeling unwell? *Maranatha! Make room for the Master!*

Facing a difficult diagnosis? *Maranatha! Make room for the Master!*

Coming to your earthly life's end? *Maranatha! Make room for the Master!*

There is **no** circumstance in your life where learning to love Jesus unconditionally will not improve it. If you let him, he will give you comfort, guidance, strength, wisdom and grace. In fact, the moments when you feel least like praying are precisely the moments when prayer is most needed and might be most effective.

So, Advent is a season to learn to open our hearts to Jesus in **every** moment. To stop cutting ourselves off from the greatest source of love when we need it the most. When life is especially tough, pray it: *Maranatha! Make room for the Master!*

And Advent is the time when we look to Jesus coming **at the end of all time**.

Matthew 24 makes it very clear that we do not know when that might be. We can observe the signs of the times and get a sense of how things are going, but we can't read the Bible or anything else as if it's a railway timetable telling us on which day and at what time Jesus returns. As it says in our reading: No one knows the hour!

It might be that we wonder if things are coming to an end for humanity when we look at the effects of climate change. We might consider things grim when we realise that nuclear warfare remains a real possibility. Throw in economic turmoil and we could easily suppose that this time, the crises we face really are the beginning of the end.

Of course, people have thought that sort of thing before. Hidden planets, Halley's comet, the end of the Mayan calendar and the Y2K bug have all led to dates for the end of the world being specified. And Christian preacher, Harold Camping, predicted that the world would end on May 21, 2011. He, at least, should have known better: which part of *no one knows the hour or the day* did he not understand?

I think that climate change is very different in character from the crackpot theories I just alluded to. It's backed by science and is being experienced in ordinary lives all around the world. We cannot mark the climate apocalypse on our calendars, but we can read the signs of the times and they don't look good.

And still we pray, *Maranatha, come Lord Jesus*. That final coming of Jesus divides humanity. Two men are working in a field: one is taken, the other left. Two women are grinding corn: one is taken, the other left.

There are two sorts of people. Some are spiritually alive and working for God's kingdom to come. Some are spiritually dead, and just live life for themselves alone.

The image of some being taken and some being left behind is stark indeed. It raises many more questions than it answers. Are the true Christians being taken straight to heaven? Or are they headed for the rapture to meet with the Lord in the air? Or is it the non-Christians being taken to hell or judgement, whilst the Christians remain to bring heaven on earth? We can't answer such questions with any confidence. But what we can say is this: our spiritual lives matter. Your openness to God and to build his kingdom has consequences that may go further than you realise.

In summary we are praying for Christ's final coming. We are praying for him to come into our lives. We are praying for a deeper sense of him at Christmas. We are lighting a light and living the abundant life that Jesus promises.

Our reading from Isaiah 2 is set amongst many prophecies of doom and judgement. But there, in the midst of all the current pain and disaster, a vision of universal hope and blessing is given, with God himself judging right and wrong between the nations.

Everyone is welcome. Disputes are equitably settled. Swords are beaten into ploughshares. Spears into pruning hooks.

This is the Advent vision. We taste it as we celebrate Christmas each year. We welcome it into our personal lives. We yearn for it in the turmoil of the world. We never give up on hope. We never give up on the light.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

It's dark out there, but the dawn is coming

It's midnight, but the Light of the World is coming.

Maranatha!

We make room for the Master.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!