



"WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING?"

Well, we're currently in what has got to be one of the weirdest Advent series I have ever preached, but it's also a relevant one. Why? Because Advent isn't just about the first coming of Jesus, it's about the second coming, too. And it's a reminder to live each day in light of that event.

But there's another reason it's relevant, particularly at this moment in time: there's been a lot of doomsaying over the course of this year, and not just because of C-19. E.g. there's:

- The *World One* computer program developed by MIT. It calculated 2020 to be the beginning of the end for human beings, based on data gathered in 1973.
- Psychic Jeane Dixon, who also predicted the end of the world for somewhere between 2020-2037. Bear in mind, though: she predicted a cure for cancer by 1967.
- Pastor Paul Begley, who on his *Coming Apocalypse* podcast has warned of all kinds of cataclysm before the year is out, based on a blue moon at Halloween.

All of which might scare the willies out of you. Then again, in the past 20 years we've had Y2K, the Mayan Calendar, and a Hadron-Collider black hole. And last year we were supposed to have seen a nuclear war, an asteroid impact, and a new ice age (and you thought Covid was bad!).

Now apart from the fact that so much of what we hear is coming from whack-jobs, it also contradicts what Jesus Himself taught His disciples.

Let's take a look ...

Matthew 24:36-51

Ok, so the disciples ask 2 questions in this chapter: 1) "When will this happen?", as in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and 2) "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?"

Now the 2 questions are linked - because Jesus' disciples would have believed that the existence of the temple in Jerusalem was a big sign that the Kingdom of God was on its way (and in a way, it was). So, for Jesus to suddenly say, "Within a generation that temple will be gone," would have been not only shocking, but confusing.

So, they ask these 2 questions, and as we saw last week, Jesus answers the first one in vs4-35. In vs36, He begins to answer the second one: "What will be the sign of Your coming (*parousia* in Greek), and of the end of the world?"

And in a nutshell, He says, "There will be no sign." None.

No rapture of the church out of the world. No 7-year Tribulation period. No rebuilt temple (Revelation 21 says there's no need for one!). None of the stuff you might have read in those *Left Behind* novels or seen in the movies. Just a gradual increase in catastrophic events, the spread of the Gospel around the world, and a lot of persecution as a result. Because if there's supposed to be a whole bunch of signs, it would contradict what Jesus says here:

"But about that day and hour no-one knows."

But that's not all that Jesus says. He also issues 3 commands, commands which are relevant to us all right here, right now, whether Jesus comes back today or in another thousand years:

1) Wise Up (vs36-41). No-one knows the day or the hour – not the angels, not even the Son (according to some texts at least). Now this could be referring to awareness; then again, it could be referring to disclosure – to the act of making something known. I.e. Jesus isn't telling, not because He doesn't *know*, but because the Father doesn't want Him to *say* (He makes the same point in Acts 1:7). But the real point is: don't be confused, misled or side-tracked. If Jesus didn't share it with the 12, He ain't gonna share it with anyone else! So ... wise up!

2) Wake Up (vs42-44). When Jesus says "Keep watch," that actually means 'stay awake!' One of the ironies of modern life is: we're rushing around from this thing to that thing, from this activity to that activity, but spiritually-speaking we're fast asleep! We're sleepwalking! Or as Jesus says here, we're like a person snoring away while the house is being burgled. We're oblivious as to where we've come from (Jesus), where we're going to (Jesus) and why we're here (Jesus). And at some point, it's going to be too late to do anything about it. So ... wake up!

3) Work Up (vs45-51). Don't be a pretender, a Sunday-only Christian: be a faithful and wise one! I.e. use the resources God has given you – your time, your skills, your finances, your conversations, your broadband. When was the last time you prayed for someone? Or heard something on a Sunday morning and decided to share it? When was the last time you talked about Jesus, or posted something about Him? Or helped someone in need and gave Jesus the credit? In the words of a certain T-shirt: "Jesus is coming – look busy!" I.e. it's time to work up, guys!

As Lightning Flashes From The East ...

So, 3 commands, all based around the idea that Jesus' return will be sudden and unexpected, like lightning (see vs27). And this isn't the only place where the Bible says this.

1 Thessalonians 5 says it ("like a thief in the night").

1 Corinthians 15 says it ("in a twinkling of an eye").

I.e. it'll happen in a moment. So be *ready*.

Now here's a final thought, in the form of another prediction of the future. This one comes from a 1950s edition of Popular Mechanics magazine:

When she (the housewife of the year 2000) cleans house she simply turns the hose on everything. Why not? Furniture, rugs, draperies, un-scratchable floors – all are made of a synthetic fabric or waterproof plastic. After the water has run down a drain in the middle of the floor (later concealed by a rug of synthetic fibre), she turns on a blast of hot air and dries ... everything!

The point being: human beings can be really good at predicting the future – and getting it wrong. Now maybe C-19 is a sign of the end, maybe not. But what it definitely is, is a sign of the kind of people we really are. A mirror, if you like. Are we able to live a simpler life? A humbler life? A less self-centred life? Are we able to hear God's voice in all this? Are we able to do His will?

To quote a classic Lenny Kravitz song, "Baby, it ain't over 'til it's over."

Until then, we've got a job to do. So, let's do it.