

Daily Reading & Meditation

Sunday (December 1): **Watch and be ready - the day of the Lord's coming draws near**

Gospel Reading: *Matthew 24:37-44*

37 As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. 40 Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Meditation: Why did Jesus compare "the coming of the Son of Man" with the "days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37)? Scripture describes both events as a day of judgment and the separation of the just from the unjust. It is a time when the Lord of heaven and earth gathers to himself those who are his own. Separation is an inevitable consequence of the fundamental choices people have made - whether for God or against God. The fundamental choices we make can either lead us towards God and his will for us or they can lead us in a direction that is opposed to God or contrary to his wisdom and plan for our lives and well-being.

The days of Noah

The Book of Genesis describes why God chose to separate Noah and his family who were faithful to God from those who had utterly rejected God and corrupted the earth with violence and evil:

"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5), "with corruption and violence spreading everywhere" (Genesis 6:11-12).

Why did so many perish when the day of judgment came? They were caught completely unaware and unprepared for the disaster that swept them away. The Lord Jesus warned his disciples and he issues the same warning to us today - be alert and be prepared to meet the Lord today and every day - and when he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

The ark of refuge

Just as God provided a safe haven and place of refuge for Noah and his family in the ark which spared them from destruction (Genesis 7), the Lord provides for us today a place of refuge in the ark of his people - the body of Christ - who listen to his word and obey his voice. God made a covenant of peace with Noah and his descendants (Genesis 9:8-17). Noah's ark was a prophetic sign and beacon of hope which prefigured the new covenant of everlasting peace which the Lord Jesus would accomplish through his atoning death on the cross, resurrection, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit on his disciples.

Jesus came to fulfill all the promises of God, including the covenant of peace which God made with Noah. Jesus' first coming was a rescue mission to set us free from sin and condemnation and to give us new life in his Holy Spirit. Jesus died for our sins, rose to everlasting life, and is now seated in glory at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He now reigns over the heavens and the earth as the exalted Lord of creation. The Lord Jesus promised that he would return again in glory to complete the work of redemption which he began at his first coming.

Our merciful Savior is also our Judge and Vindicator

God fulfills all his promises to us in Jesus, our merciful Savior, who will come again as our Judge and Vindicator. Jesus told his disciples that the Father has given him all authority to execute judgments on the earth "because he is the Son of man" (John 5:27). The "Son of man" is a Messianic title for God's anointed one who will overthrow God's enemies and establish an everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace. The "Son of man" is described in the Book of Daniel as the one who is given supreme authority to judge and execute justice on the earth (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus came the first time to lay down his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. He promises to return again at the "end of the age" to complete the work of restoration and final judgment. While we do not know the time of his return, we will not mistake it when it happens. It will be apparent to all, both to the followers of the Lord Jesus and to every inhabitant on the earth as well.

One is taken away and the other is left

How are we to live our lives now in light of Jesus' promise to return again as our Lord and Judge on the final day of judgment? Jesus gives two striking images to illustrate the urgency of the need to not be caught off guard and unprepared when we are suddenly summoned to appear before the Lord on the day of judgment (Matthew 24:40-41). The first image Jesus used is a description of two men working together in the field - very likely close family members or close co-workers. One is suddenly taken away and the other is left. The image of two women who are working closely together repeats the theme of the sudden rupture and separation

The thief in the night

Jesus' second story of the thief in the night (Matthew 24:43-44) brings home the necessity for constant watchfulness and being on guard to avert the danger of plunder and destruction, especially under the cover of darkness and secrecy! While no thief would announce his intention in advance, nor the time when he would strike, lack of vigilance would nonetheless invite disaster for those who do not keep a watchful eye and guard against the thief who would try to break in and steal. Satan tries to rob us of our faith in Jesus Christ and the treasure of the kingdom which Christ has won for us.

Advent people - watching with expectant faith and yearning for Christ's coming

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the Day when the Lord would judge between the nations and establish peace over the earth. In that day the righteous - all peoples who believed in him and who listened to his teaching and instruction - would come to his holy mountain and house to worship him and dwell with him in everlasting peace (Isaiah 2:3-5). The Advent season reminds us that we are living in the time between the first coming and second coming of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus calls us to be alert and watchful for his coming. He comes to us each and every day and he knocks on the door of our heart and home. Do you listen for his voice and welcome him into your life? Let his word in the Scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you draw you to a deeper faith, hope, and yearning for his kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy. Those who wait upon the Lord today and listen to his word will not be disappointed. The Lord will come and bring you to his banquet table to feast with him.

Daily Quote from the early church fathers: *Finding the pearl of great price*, by Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)

"All who listen to the depths of the gospel and live it so completely that none of it remains veiled from them care very little about whether the end of the world will come suddenly and all at once or gradually and little by little. Instead, they bear in mind only that each individual's end or death will arrive on a day and hour unknown to him and that upon each one of us 'the day of the Lord will come like a thief' (1 Thessalonians 5:2). It is important therefore to be vigilant, whether in the evening (that is, in one's youth) or in the middle of the night (that is, at human life's darkest hour) or when the cock crows (at full maturity) or in the morning (when one is well advanced in old age).

"When God the Word comes and brings an end to the progress of this life, he will gather up the one who gave 'no sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids' (Psalm 132:4) and kept the commandment of the One who said, 'Be vigilant at all times' (Luke 21:36). ...But I know another kind of end for the righteous person who is able to say along with the apostle, 'Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world' (Galatians 6:14). In a certain sense, the end of the world has already come for the person to whom the world is crucified. And to one who is dead to worldly things the day of the Lord has already arrived, for the Son of man comes to the soul of the one who no longer lives for sin or for the world." (*excerpt Commentary on Matthew 56*)

OPENING PRAYER "Lord Jesus, you have captured my heart for you. Make me strong in faith, steadfast in hope, and generous in love that I may seek to please you in all things and bring you glory and praise. Keep me ever watchful for the coming of your kingdom today and every day of my life." **Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER:- **World Peace, .**

Almighty God, in whose hands lies the destiny of men and nations, Let not the hopes of men perish, nor the sacrifices of men be in vain. Grant us therefore grace and courage to give and to receive the forgiveness which alone can heal today's wounds. Draw us, O Lord, towards loving kindness and guide us into the way of peace. **Amen.**