

The coming of the kingdom

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we know there will come a day when we can see our Saviour face to face, to talk with him and laugh with him freely.

But until that day, you say that we hear his voice in the Scriptures. So help us today to hear the voice of Jesus, and not just hear, but truly listen, to catch his every word, to obey his instructions, so that when he comes, we'll be more than ready to welcome him.

We pray all this in his name, and for his name's sake. Amen. Now, have you ever missed a flight? Thankfully, I haven't, although there's been a close call or two.

But over the years, I've known a few who have, usually because they have underestimated time on the road, or they've misplaced their passport, or they've gotten their dates mixed up.

And one of the more disastrous stories I've heard involves a couple named Katie and David. Now, Katie and David were going to get married and have their dream wedding on an island in Cyprus.

[1 : 11] Everything had been arranged, the accommodation, the wedding invitations, the fine dining restaurant. This was an event they simply couldn't miss.

So there they are, at the gate in the airport, all set to depart for the biggest event of their lives. That is, until the bride-to-be counted her luggage and realised a suitcase was missing.

And this wasn't just any suitcase, it was the one with her wedding dress in it. And so in a panic, she retraced her steps and discovered she had left it back at the security checkpoint.

And because she had left it unattended, it was deemed a security breach, meaning that this time, both she and her back had to be subjected to a more thorough search.

And as a result, despite her pleas, the plane took off without them. They had just missed their can't-miss event.

[2 : 21] And today, Jesus wants us to be aware that we could end up in exactly the same boat if we are not careful. You see, one day, the kingdom of God will come in all its fullness and glory.

It will be the can't-miss event of human history. And it will be unmissable in two ways. First of all, it will be unmissable in the sense that everyone on earth, without exception, will know exactly what is going on.

No one can claim ignorance. Because look at how Jesus describes this day down in verse 24. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.

Here's the picture. Since coming back to Guqin, I have witnessed some magnificent thunderstorms. I can remember a night or two where I'm just seated at home in my living room with the curtains all drawn, when suddenly there's a flash of lightning that cracks across the sky.

And this bright flash illuminates not just the darkness outside, but even my living room inside as the light pierces through even my curtains.

[3 : 47] That's how lightning simply is. It's not subtle. It's obvious. It's completely unmissable. And Jesus says when he comes again, that is how it's going to be like.

No one will say, oh, I didn't see anything. No one will be wondering. Everyone will know who is here. The rest of the Bible bears this out.

2 Thessalonians 1 verse 7 says the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 16 says when he returns, you will hear the trumpet call of God.

Titus 2 verse 13 describes this event as the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour. It will be unmissable.

This is the can't-miss event of human history. So this event is unmissable in the sense that everyone cannot help but know what day it is.

[5 : 00] But second of all, this event is also unmissable in the sense that this is the day all Christians are longing for.

Look at how Jesus puts it to his disciples in verse 22. The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man.

In other words, Jesus expects that Christians just can't wait for this day. Now, as you can see from our bulletin, Jeremy and Amber are going to get married in just two weeks.

And you can bet they can't wait for it. They wouldn't want to miss their wedding day. And that is what we are talking about here. The day of the coming of the Lord is the day we don't want to miss because the book of Revelation tells us it is our wedding day.

It is the day we get to see the one we love as Jesus the bridegroom comes for his church, his bride, and gives us our happily ever after.

[6 : 19] It's going to be the greatest day of our lives. And so, no way do we want to miss out. But here is the big concern of the rest of today's passage.

Jesus says if we are not careful, we can end up like Katie and David. We will miss out on our can't miss event. Now, perhaps some of us will say, oh, no way that will happen.

We've got plenty of time, right? We've got everything in hand. But you know what? Isn't that exactly what Katie and David would have said prior to missing their flight?

The truth is we could miss out if we become complacent and we do not heed what Jesus says here. And that is certainly not what Jesus wants for you and I.

And so, this morning, let us listen to his warnings if we don't want to miss out, Jesus says, here are four things to keep in mind. Don't be deceived by wrong expectations.

[7 : 34] Don't be daunted by the prospect of suffering. Don't be distracted by the preoccupations of this life. And don't be double-minded in our walk with our God.

So those are our four headings for this morning. So firstly, don't be deceived by the wrong expectations. Jesus. In verse 20, the Pharisees come to Jesus wanting to know, when will the kingdom of God come?

Now, notice what they didn't ask. They didn't ask, what is the kingdom of God? They assumed they knew. After all, wasn't that the major thing God was promising throughout the entire Old Testament?

they knew evil existed? They knew wickedness existed? After all, don't the Romans exist?

And they knew that God had promised one day to overthrow all that is evil and judge all that is wicked so people can live under God's rule and reign and enjoy blessing and relationship with God all over again.

[8 : 48] That is the kingdom of God. And now the Pharisees come to Jesus and ask him, when is all that going to happen?

And really, they are questioning Jesus' credentials. You see, by asking this, what the Pharisees are really saying is that they don't believe God's kingdom is here in any shape or form right now.

They certainly don't recognize Jesus' ministry to be related to the kingdom in any way. After all, they probably reason, if God's kingdom was here, then surely Rome would be overthrown, God would put his king on the throne, and the nation will prosper, right?

But look at this carpenter from Nazareth, or his God is just a bunch of fishermen following him. He's certainly not leading any army against the Romans. So, of course, he's got nothing to do with God's glorious kingdom, right?

But here's the thing, the Pharisees have got it all wrong, because they have the wrong expectations. That is Jesus' point in his reply in verse 20.

[10 : 16] Look, he says, God's kingdom isn't some scientific object for you to measure. It isn't some political party with an address.

So, in that sense, you can't see it. You can't just point to a moment in time and say, here it is. Or, you just can't point to a specific place and say, there it is.

But, Jesus says, that doesn't mean the kingdom isn't already here. Verse 21, the kingdom is in your midst. Why?

Because look carefully, Jesus says, the king is right in front of you. There's no need to go looking all over the place for the kingdom, because the kingdom of God is present in Jesus and in what he is doing in the lives of people.

One evidence, well, then look no further than last week. Did not Jesus heal and cleanse several lepers? And was not one of them a Samaritan outsider so grateful that he put his complete trust in Jesus?

[11:39] And isn't that just another way of saying that this Samaritan now acknowledges Jesus rules and reigns over him as his Lord? In other words, isn't all of this a sign that the kingdom of God is present as people, in fact, people who are considered God's enemies are made whole again and brought back into relationship with the rightful king?

But here's the tragedy, the Pharisees completely miss it because they have the wrong expectations of the kingdom. To them, God's reign and rule can only come if there is a deliverer who will rally his people against the hated Romans.

It can only come if this deliverer is determined to keep out unclean Gentiles at all costs. And Jesus doesn't fit the bill. It's a bit like how some people, in my experience, refuse at first to believe that I am really Brian King because they are fully expecting to meet some white guy due to my name. And similarly, because the Pharisees refuse to adjust their expectations, they miss the kingdom. They live as if it had not come.

And my brothers and sisters, so can we if we take our eyes off Jesus. You see, we can do that, can't we?

[13:15] Sometimes we just want the spectacle of the kingdom without the substance. We think we can be Christian while avoiding submitting our awe to Christ.

Now, of course, none of us would put it so crassly. But be honest. Are you sometimes more interested in keeping up your appearance as a Christian rather than truly trusting and following Christ?

Do you sometimes use Christian language like, ah, this is kingdom work, or I'm doing this for God's glory as a way of justifying something you want to do?

But my friends, the truth is you can use kingdom language all you like, but if King Jesus is not present in what you do, the kingdom is not present no matter what it looks like on the outside. Over half a century ago, Donald Barnhouse, pastor of Philadelphia's historic 10th Presbyterian Church, gave this famous illustration.

[14:31] He asked, what would it look like if Satan took control of a town in America? Oh, well, surely we'll say there'll be widespread violence, pornography in every corner, and lots of degenerate behaviour, right?

But he said no. if Satan took over, all of the bars and the gambling places would be closed, pornography would be banished, the streets would be occupied by tidy pedestrians who smile at one another, there would be no swearing, the kids would answer, yes sir, no ma'am, and the churches would be full on Sunday, where Christ is not preached.

You see, as long as Jesus is not present, it doesn't matter if there is the appearance of good behaviour and moral values and charity. In fact, Satan is more than happy for you to go to church every week and be nice to everyone as long as you don't see and know and worship Christ. Because that means you are missing out on the kingdom. So don't be deceived. Secondly, don't be daunted by the prospect of suffering.

In verses 22 to 25, Jesus now turns his attention to the disciples. Now, the disciples are different from the Pharisees. They do know Jesus is the king.

[16:11] They do know that the kingdom is in their midst. But that opens them to a different danger. Verse 22, Then he said to his disciples, the time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.

What Jesus means is this. Jesus is with them physically right now, but one day, he won't be. He will have gone back to heaven.

And God's people are going to enter a prolonged time where plenty will oppose them, persecute them, make life hard for them.

And that's exactly what we find in the book of Acts and in the letters of Paul and throughout church history, don't we? And Jesus says that is when we will be especially vulnerable.

You see, what do we want when we are in pain, when we are suffering? We all want relief that is natural. people will say, there is Jesus.

[17:24] There will be plenty of people proclaiming God's kingdom has already arrived in full, when it hasn't actually yet.

People will say, verse 23, there is Jesus, or here he is. And we will want to believe them because we are sick and tired of all the troubles that we face in this world.

We want the kingdom in all its fullness now, so we don't have to suffer. It's true, isn't it? Think of how many so-called Christian teachers engage in end-time speculation.

It is not hard to find them. They say, look here, look there. Because of this or that, that means the second coming is here, or it is just around the corner.

The return of Christ is coming because of this barcode, or this microchip, or because of the rise of this political leader, or because of the earthquake in that region.

[18 : 31] Look here, look there, look here, look there, look everywhere but the Jesus of the Bible himself. But Jesus says, ignore these people.

Don't go running after them. For if you do, you won't see the real kingdom of God. You will just see the overactive imaginations of man.

After all, remember what we said at the beginning of this sermon in verse 24? When Jesus comes back, no one can miss it.

It will be obvious to all. You won't need anyone pointing it out to you. You don't need some guy telling you that he's got some special inside information, or some secret prophecy which you can have access to if you just buy his book.

You don't need those people from the Shin Shionji cult telling you to go and attend their special Bible studies on the book of Revelation so that by the end of it, only then you will realise that their founder is actually the Messiah.

[19 : 46] No. When Jesus comes again, you don't have to worry you will miss him. You know it's him for sure. You won't miss the day the kingdom arrives any more than the people in Noah's day could miss the arrival of the flood waters.

So ignore these people. You see, Jesus understands how our minds work. The problem is not that we are longing for Jesus to come to put an end to our pain and suffering.

That's a good thing. The problem rather is that we can be so overcome by the hardship we are facing in this life, we begin to become more vulnerable to any message that promises an end to all of that right here, right now.

Whether these are so-called prophecies that speculate on all sorts of different signs that tell us Jesus is coming, or more generally, whether these are talks at rallies that keep promising endless healing and revival and glory without any of the struggle or necessity for endurance and even sacrifice, all of these are just variations of the same basic message that Jesus' kingdom has already come in its fullness and Jesus says don't be taken in by such messages.

But instead, take heart if you suffer as a result of genuinely trying to follow Jesus faithfully.

[21 : 37] Because actually, that is a sign you haven't missed the kingdom. For it's not Jesus' kingdom cross-shape.

Look at verse 25. Before Jesus comes in glory, first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

That is the proper order. If we follow Jesus as king, we should expect his experience to be our experience. We should expect the glory of the kingdom to be preceded first by difficulty and hardship.

And so if we want to be prepared for the kingdom, we should acknowledge it's going to be hard, but we can give every hard thing we face to God, knowing it's just part of the journey, and one day we will reach our destination.

As the disciples themselves said in Acts chapter 14 verse 22, we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

[22 : 54] people. But Jesus knows the prospect of suffering is not the only thing that could cause us to miss out on God's kingdom, and so now he gives us his third warning.

Thirdly, don't be distracted by the preoccupations of this life. Look at verses 26 to 30. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot.

People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire, and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. Jesus now mentions two Old Testament stories. The first story is of Noah from Genesis 6 to 9, which we actually just looked at a month ago.

[24 : 08] And the second story is that of Lot from Genesis 19. And these two stories both have something in common. Have you spotted it?

It was that when the day of judgment came, it took everyone by surprise because the days leading up to that day were surprisingly normal.

There was nothing strange in the sky. There was no blood moon. No, life was normal and everyone was carrying on as normal. They were getting engaged and getting married.

They were doing their grocery shopping and checking out the latest cafe. They were buying their first homes, building their careers, setting down roots.

And then boom, the flood came. The sulfur came. The judgment came, completely unexpectedly. And Jesus says that is exactly how it will be like when he comes as well.

[25 : 18] It will be unexpected. It will be a surprise. Now, we need to clarify a bit here. When Jesus says it will be unexpected and a surprise, it's not because we don't know he is coming at all.

I mean, right now he is telling us. He is warning us. Back in Genesis 19, Lot himself warned his sons-in-law. They just thought he was joking.

So, it wouldn't be unexpected because we have never been told. No, the reason it will be unexpected and a surprise is because everyone had become distracted by the preoccupations of life.

Life was normal. And because life was normal, everyone assumed it would always be normal. Nothing would ever happen.

Nothing would ever change. And could that be our danger as well? Jesus thinks so. After all, you would have expected for him to focus on how evil and wicked society was during Noah and Lot's time.

[26 : 38] and for him to say, oh, that's the danger. But instead, Jesus chooses to identify the mundaneness of everyday life as the thing that might cause us to miss out on God's kingdom.

You see, isn't life mostly normal for us day by day? life. And because it's so normal, we get seduced by its routines and suck into becoming preoccupied with just this life.

We're only thinking about what we're going to do with our next paycheck. We're only thinking about when we will take our next holiday. We're only thinking about the next stage of our career or our business or maybe we have school-going kids and we're just thinking about where to put them in school for secondary school or something like that.

We become unable just to see any further than that. Oh, the fact that Jesus will come again? The fact that the kingdom will come in its fullness and that will be the end of all who go against God? Oh, that's too far away. That's too remote. It won't happen. We forget that God has put an expiry date on this present age.

[28 : 02] And because it seems so far away, we become distracted by the preoccupations of this life. How easy it is, isn't it, for life to go like this?

You might say, oh, I'm a student now. And actually, I'm pretty interested. I'm even challenged by what Jesus has been saying to me from the Bible about how I should make him my saviour and king.

And I've been challenged about how I should use my money or what I should prioritise or how I should relate to others to live in line with his kingdom. But, yeah, let me think more about that later. I have an exam to focus on first. And then next time we say, ah, yes, yes, yes, yes, I'll put God's kingdom first, but, eh, I just graduated, first let me focus on my new job.

And then, ah, yeah, yeah, yeah, the job a bit more settled now, but wait till I sort out my relationship with my boyfriend or girlfriend. Ah, yeah, yeah, wait, wait till I'm settled into my marriage. Ah, wait, wait till I'm settled with my new baby.

[29 : 12] And then on and on it goes until life has mostly passed you by, and then suddenly, boom, lightning flashes, Jesus arrives, and you're not ready.

And Jesus says living like that would be foolish. In fact, that is the fourth danger he wants us to warn about. He wants to warn us about.

Fourthly, don't be double-minded in our walk with God. It is tempting, isn't it, to have a foot in both worlds. I've got to make Jesus king, but at the same time, I still want to be attached to this world.

I actually want to be distracted by the preoccupations of this life. But look at verse 31. On that day, no one who is on the roof, on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Now, here is Jesus' basic point. If you know the kingdom is coming, and you don't want to miss out on this can't miss event, then drop everything now.

[30 : 33] Follow him. Don't see the king, rather than run towards him, choose to run instead to the things of this world that you've gotten attached to.

Don't make your life all about the things of this world, and then try to hold on to them and to Jesus at the same time. You can't do it. They're in different directions.

Don't be double-minded in our walk with God. For Jesus says there are consequences. Verse 32. Remember Lot's wife.

What happened to her? Well, if you're not familiar with the story, let me read to you a little from Genesis 19, starting at verse 23. By the time Lot reached Zohar, the sun had risen over the land, then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord out of the heavens.

Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities and also the vegetation in the land. Verse 26.

[31 : 49] But Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt. You see what happened to Lot's wife. She was being led away from judgment and towards salvation.

But though she appeared to be physically safe, her heart was still very much wrapped up with the things of Sodom. It belonged to something other than the gospel.

She loved the world, she didn't long for the kingdom of God and so she paused and she looked back. Her eyes revealed her affections.

judgment overtook her. And so Jesus says, heed the warning, don't be like Lot's wife.

Don't be double-minded. Drop everything for Jesus. Don't look back because the day when God's kingdom comes will one day arrive and it will be certain and unexpected.

[32 : 55] So run hard after Jesus. Don't look back. don't turn back. Now that is hard, I know. That is why Jesus says becoming a Christian is a little bit like losing your life, verse 33.

The truth is, if you want to be a Christian, sometimes you have to leave some part of your life behind and not look back.

A job, a relationship, even an object, maybe like a smartphone that's taking you away from Jesus. I don't think we can truly follow Christ for a long time without eventually having to make a sacrifice somewhere.

perhaps even today, Jesus is telling you that there is something you need to drop if you are going to run hard after him.

Don't ignore him. But if you do so, you will preserve your life. For on that day, verses 34 and 35, there is going to be a separation.

[34 : 17] separation. Now, this is not what is sometimes popularly known as the doctrine of the rapture, where Jesus secretly appears and whips you away. That doctrine of the rapture is unbiblical.

No. This is talking about final separation. One will be taken to heaven, the other to hell. One will be taken to safety, another to everlasting destruction, just like in the days of Noah and Lot.

These are people who might live in the closest relationships together. Perhaps they are husband and wife, they are in bed together. And they are doing normal things together, grinding grain, working at the laptop, preparing supper.

together. But when the end comes, if one of you haven't looked back but you fixed your eyes on Jesus, then good news, you haven't missed out on the kingdom.

But if that describes only your spouse rather than you, then you'll be split apart because you haven't clung unto Jesus.

[35 : 39] Which takes us to verse 37. This is probably the most difficult verse in this passage to interpret and if you read seven different commentaries, you will get seven different answers.

But this seems to be what is happening as far as I can tell. Jesus has just said verse 35, one will be taken and so the disciples ask, where to?

And Jesus' enigmatic answer, where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather, seems to be his way of saying, look, that is not the most important question.

What you need to understand is that if you are spiritually dead, you are like a dead animal, ready to be devoured. If you are spiritually dead, now judgment is coming like the vultures. And that's what you should be concerned about. But here is the good news, we don't have to be scared of that day.

[36 : 48] In fact, we are longing for this day, remember? Why? Because verse 37 is not the only reference to a dead body in this passage.

No, you see, when Jesus talks about losing life to preserve life, he wasn't just talking about how we should live. He was also talking about what he did with his own life.

As verse 25 said, he must suffer and be rejected. And the suffering and rejection he went through actually ends up with him having a dead body.

And on that day, 2,000 years ago, as he wore a crown of thorns and had his body hung up on the cross, he was actually taking the judgment that we deserve.

And this king was giving his very life so we could become part of his kingdom. He was making sure the day when the Son of Man comes again will be a day we will be excited and delighted to see he doesn't want us to miss out.

[38 : 04] But to do that, we have to trust him, trust his words. So my brothers and sisters, listen to Jesus, heed his warnings.

One day the biggest can't miss event in human history will occur. It will be unexpected but obvious.

And if we are not deceived by the wrong expectations, if we are not daunted by the prospect of suffering, if we are not distracted by the preoccupations of this life, and not double-minded in our walkway God, but we are clinging to the king all of our days, we will miss out.

So don't miss the kingdom. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you have spoken by your word, and Father, we pray that we would listen, we would heed the warnings of Jesus.

And so Father, please help us to take what we have just heard to heart, help us not to be complacent, to take things for granted, but help us to lose our life for you so that we might gain it in the end.

Father, if there's anyone in danger of missing out, Lord, I pray that you would pull him or her back so that all of us will be together and not separated at the end.

[39 : 43] So please be merciful. Please do your work in our lives. Please turn our eyes onto Jesus. All this we pray in the name of Christ.

Amen.