

St Paul's Dorking Small Group Notes w/c 3rd December 2017

Advent- Prophetic Hope Mark 13: 26-37

Jesus is talking to his disciples about signs of the end of time, and how we should watch for this event. Advent is defined as expectant waiting and preparation to celebrate both Jesus birth and his second coming. Mark chapter 13 occurs in the last week of Jesus' life, when he was concentrating on his disciples. The inner core of four disciples had admired the building of the temple and asked Jesus when the destruction of the temple would occur. Jesus words were prophetic:

1. A message for the present: vv. 14-23 Jesus describes the destruction of the temple: in AD70 it happened.
2. A message for the future (v 26). After a time of distress, false prophets and an unstable and unkind world, Jesus will return. Christ will be unmistakable and seen by all (Rev 1 v7). However, no one knows the time- not even Jesus (v32)! We have been looking at Jesus' second coming several times recently, as Paul's letter to the Thessalonians talks about it (1Thess 4:13 -18; 5:1-11). This will be the **Day of the Lord**
3. A message from Jesus about how the disciples should live in their own age, and how we should live in ours, during the **Delay of the Lord** (v32-37). We are called to be alert, be on guard v33. We are like the servants in a big house, who are all alert waiting for when their master returns.

Jesus clearly says we are to be active; this is not a passive waiting like the 3rd servant in the parable of talents (Mat 25:14-30). God is calling us to 'be wakeful and alert': living fully for him, in the certain knowledge he will return.

God has kept the day of Jesus return deliberately hidden. If we have no date, we can't fixate on it, and we are more likely to pay attention to how we live now. One of the big differences between us and the Thessalonians is that at the time of writing, Paul believed Jesus return was imminent. Nothing else mattered, other than the urgency of bringing people to Christ. We now do not have that same sense of planning exclusively for one day, and so we are in danger of not planning at all. We are called to **prepare purposefully** rather than to simply wait or to ignore the end goal.

In the story of the prodigal son (Luke 11) I like to think that the reason the father was so quick to see his son coming down the road (v15) was not because he had been watching constantly, but because he worked, prayed and looked out, maybe once a day. Then he could run to meet him knowing that his home was ready to welcome him back.

Waiting is neither a time for furious activity nor something passive; its **purposeful preparation**. Our lives get so full that if we do not purposefully create times that mark out our preparation, our faith and our hope, we will not be purposefully prepared. Advent lends itself to being a time to experiment with this, as we have a visual countdown of each day to Christmas: the advent calendar or candle. Mark each day in some way other than just by eating the choc!

Advent is an opportunity to be adventurous: to step into new ways of faith and into a deepening understanding of what it is to live in this world and at the same time to long for the future coming of Christ. Jesus prophesied his future return. We have a hope in that. Let's mark its importance by how we live this Advent, by how we live now, in the **Delay of the Lord**, as well as by our future hope in the **Day of the Lord**. There is plenty we can do to bring those around us to greater wholeness and to bring ourselves into a deeper, richer awareness of God. We just need to decide what and then make sure we carve out time and space for it. Let's **prepare purposefully and participate now**.

Questions for your group to consider.

1. Are you ready for Christmas? On a scale of 1-10 are you a planner or a last minute-r?
2. If we live for the Day of the Lord, what are the implications for now; to what extent should we be investing our time and money in planning for our own and our children's futures? Where does it leave us on pensions?
3. Does the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) or the image of the father seeing his son a long way off (Luke 15:20) help in understanding the idea of preparing purposefully but participating now?
4. If Jesus were to return now, do we feel that our own homes are in order? Are we secure in our faith and in who we are? Are there things we indulge in which we would not want to be doing in Jesus sight? Have we lived the lives we want to have led, should he return?
5. Do we take regular moments out of normal life to focus on Jesus' return and the power of what he can be doing in our lives right now? Can we kick start this way of living this Advent using the (calendar/candle), and resolve to do one thing. Examples below or come up with some other ideas:
 - Take five minutes out pre day to pray
 - Take five minutes to read the Bible, Read a verse a day, or a Chapter of one of the gospels, or sign up for an Advent Challenge with the Bible Society <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/adventchallenge/>
 - Focus on one thing that is making you less prepared; something that is making you unhealthy in body, mind or spirit, and consider can I reduce it a little each day this month?
 - Write things to thank God for/ people to pray for, on Post-its, one per day, and pray into one each day.
 - Simply watch the light of a candle and remember that Jesus died for you.
6. What have you learnt from Thessalonians and Mark about the Day of the Lord and Delay of the Lord?