

The coming of the son of man

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[0 : 00] I don't know what plans you have for the 26th of October, 2028. But if reports are to be believed, you maybe should put them on hold, because apparently the end of the world is nigh.

Well, not that nigh. It's about 30 years coming, or so we're told. At least there's some remote possibility that that might be the case. A meteorite is heading for Earth.

1997 XF-11. Sounds like a sports car, but apparently it's a meteorite. And I'm sure you've noticed that case in the news.

If you haven't, well, you won't know what I'm talking about. But it's received quite a bit of coverage.

This meteorite that apparently is heading, possibly, on a collision course with Earth.

And so there's been much talk of the end of the world, and the possibility that this could be the end of the world. And what I want to do this evening is to consider some of the Bible's teaching on this subject.

[1 : 11] Now, there was no collusion with Derek, who was preaching this morning, I believe, on the judgment. It simply emerged from the passages that we're looking at in Noah.

And especially these verses that we find in Matthew that draw a parallel between the days of Noah and the days that will proceed at the end of the world.

So I want to think a little of some of the teaching that we find on this subject in the passage that we've read in Matthew's Gospel. Now, we can draw together teaching from different passages, but I want to restrict myself to what we find in this particular passage that we've read.

It's worth making this point that in the Bible, the end of the world is always seen as being coincident with the second coming of Jesus Christ.

They're not separate events. They are seen as part of a parcel of one event. Jesus will come, and that will be what is also spoken of in the Bible as the end.

[2 : 16] Now, we should stress that it's not an absolute end. It's the end of one particular phase. It will be a time when this world as we know it will be consumed, but there will be ushered in a new heaven and a new earth.

So it's not an absolute end. But nonetheless, the word end is one that is used to describe it in the Bible. But it goes together with the coming of Jesus Christ, the second coming of Jesus Christ.

So what does this passage in Matthew's Gospel teach us about this event? And especially with reference to the parallel that is drawn with the days of Noah, as we see it there in verse 37 of Matthew chapter 24.

But as in the days of Noah, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. We can maybe ask the following questions.

First of all, when? When will it be? When will this end come? And secondly, what will it be like? And again, restricting ourselves to what we find in this passage.

[3 : 29] And then thirdly, what attitude should we as Christians have in the light of this coming day? First of all, when will it be?

Maybe it's worth stressing almost as by and by that it will be. When we think of this natureite, of our different statistics quoted, some say there's a one in 20,000 chance, others say it's one in 300,000, I don't know.

But all these figures are quoted and bandied about concerning the possibility or the probability of this happening or not happening. Well, if we're speaking about the second coming of Jesus, we can say there's a one in one chance.

You see, this will happen. Make no mistake. There is nothing sure. There is a day coming when Jesus will return. And again, just in the passing, it may be sobering to notice how scientists, rightly so, when they discover this very remote possibility that a meteorite may in some 30 years strike

Earth, a possibility so remote, I think probably even less likely than Scotland winning the World Cup, and now that is seriously unlikely.

And yet even something so unlikely, yet they go out at great lengths and at great pains to warn us, and to say, well, this may happen. And what should be done, and what measure should be taken? [4 : 57] Should we be thinking about seeing what can be done, what missile could be arranged to divert it from course, and all the rest of it, and all very seriously, and I'm not criticizing them.

But isn't it interesting what effort they expend, and what concern they have to warn us about this very remote possibility? And yet, I wonder, if we think of ourselves, we who have returned to the Word of God, and consider it to be absolutely true, and we who are absolutely persuaded that we know, not the day, perhaps, not perhaps, not the day, but we know that there is a day coming when Jesus will return.

And yet, we are perhaps not as zealous as the scientists in giving warning of this fact to others. But again, that's almost by the by.

The question is when? When will it happen? Well, verse 36 gives us a very clear answer, and the clear answer being that we don't know. We don't know. We don't know the day, we don't know the hour.

And for those, and there have been Christians among them who have tried to be very clever and say, ah, yes, it says we don't know the day or the hour, but, well, we could maybe have a good guess at the month or the year.

[6 : 17] That is to do a gross injustice to the text, because the language that has been used, especially that word hour, is a word that is used to speak of time in a general way, not of 60 minutes.

What Jesus is saying is very clearly that we don't know. We have no idea as to the time when Jesus will return. So, if this is of any comfort to you, we can be pretty sure that it's not 2028, because if it was, we wouldn't know about it.

So, again, I don't know if that's of, I don't imagine anybody was too concerned, but if you were, I think I can safely predict that it won't be 2028.

So, we don't know when it will be. But we are given, even in this passage, some clues about the kind of time that it will be, the kind of time that will precede the coming of Jesus.

And that is where we have this reference to the days of Noah. It will be as in the days of Noah. And then Jesus gives a description of the days of Noah, and he says it will be like this.

[7 : 32] And he mentions one or two things that were features of the days of Noah. There in verse 38, As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark.

Now, the picture that has been painted by Jesus very deliberately is a picture of normality. Now, that in itself is quite interesting, because when we look in Genesis, to the account there, and the description of the times of Noah, the focus is very much and very deliberately on the exceeding simpleness of the age, and of the way in which the people had gone so far from God.

And yet, the focus of Jesus is not on that. He makes no reference to that being a feature of the days of Noah. Rather, his focus is on the fact that things were going on just as they had always been.

It is a picture of normality. And we can maybe just for a moment imagine ourselves with Noah. Imagine Noah, he's finished building the ark, and everything's been done, and let's assume it's the day before the flood.

Noah maybe doesn't even realize that the next day the heavens are going to open, and he goes to a wander. He goes to a wander around to see what's going on. And what would he have seen on that day before the flood? What would he have heard?

[8 : 52] What conversations would he have been able to overhear? Well, over there, he'd have heard somebody maybe inviting folks to a wedding. They were getting married next week. Why don't you come along? And the folks would say, Yes, great, we'll be there.

Hope it's a nice day. Hope the rain stays on. Little did they know that there wouldn't be a next week. And then he would carry on his way, and he would find a couple of folks chatting away and maybe doing some deal, some business to buy some produce.

And they would say, Oh, well, yes, you can deliver it on such and such a day. And the other would say, That's fine, I'll be able to pay you, not this week, but next week. Little did they know that there would be no next week.

These are the kind of things that would have been going on. Everything was going on as normal. And it's also interesting to note that the activities that are mentioned here by Jesus are all perfectly legitimate activities in and of themselves, and the activities to be commended, marrying and giving in marriage.

The people were following the divine order in terms of family life. These were not things that were wrong in and of themselves. Quite the reverse.

[9 : 58] But the problem was that all this normal, everyday activity was being done without any reference to God, without any concern for what God might think or what God had said would happen.

No concern with what was being told them by Noah himself as he built the ark and as he preached to them. A picture of normality.

And so it will be, before Jesus returns, it will be a day when everything is going on as per usual. There will be people marrying and giving in marriage.

There will be couples losing sleep over who to invite and what aunt to offend or what uncle to include. They'll be just doing the normal things. There will be people going down Inverness High Street and into boats and they'll be getting their three for two offers and they'll have enough shampoo to last them six months or a year.

A great bargain. Little do they know that they won't need that. You see, everything will be going on as normal. People will be maybe putting in extra hours of work so they can take time off to watch the World Cup.

[11 : 03] Everything as normal. A picture of normality. That is what Jesus is trying to convey or is conveying with this parallel with the days of Noah.

It will be a time of normality but it will also be a time of ignorance. In verse 39 we read And knew not until the flood came.

They knew not. Now, as we read it there in that verse the impression seems to be given that the reference is to their knowledge of the coming flood and certainly that's included.

But I think the language rather is more general and the picture is of a people who knew nothing. Who knew nothing about God and about his plans and about his warnings.

They were quite ambivalent to, quite oblivious to, quite indifferent to what God had said and what God's standards were and what God required of them. It is a picture of almost blissful ignorance.

[12 : 07] They knew nothing. Now, why was that? Why did the people in the days of Noah know nothing? Well, it wasn't because of any lack of information.

It wasn't because the information wasn't available to them. We have Noah, of course. In 2 Peter he's actually described as a preacher of righteousness.

And so there's very much a message given that Noah, as well as building the ark, was involved in verbal communication. He was speaking to people and telling them what was to come.

Maybe in response to questions that were asked and to curious observers who would say, well, what's this for? And Noah would tell them. He would say, well, God's told me that there's a flood coming. And they would nod and some would smile and some would laugh and they would walk on. You see, the information was available to them. But they remained ignorant. Why? Because they wouldn't receive the information. They wouldn't accept the information.

[13 : 07] They thought it utter and fully. They thought, Noah, I'm sure, we're not told this, but I think it's reasonable to assume that most people thought that Noah was at best a quaint eccentric and at worst, a raving lunatic.

And they just watched as he built his ark. And that is the way it was, a time of ignorance. And it will be the same in the days preceding the coming of Jesus for a second time.

We live in a land where even today, most homes will have a Bible somewhere tucked away. They'll be able to open that Bible and to read the passage that we've read and read other passages that say very clearly that there's a day coming when Jesus will return, an instruction given as to how we can be ready for that day.

The information is there. There's no lack of information. And yet, for the most part, what was true of men and women in the days of Noah is true today and will be true on the day that Jesus returns, that they knew nothing of these things.

Not because of a lack of opportunity, but because of a lack of interest and concern. And it's true that we live in a day when, for the most part, if somebody speaks about the second coming of the literal

and physical coming of Jesus for a second time, that kind of subject is almost viewed as cultic. [14:34] They say, well, that's what the cults are interested in, that kind of thing. You know, normal, balanced, reasonable people aren't concerned with those kind of things. They don't believe in those kind of things. I don't mind you being a Christian and preaching about how to live a good life, but this business about Jesus coming again, that's just bizarre.

That's just extreme. That's just fanatical. That is the general view. People, as in the days of Noah, will have nothing to do with this kind of matter and certainly will give it no serious consideration. The day of Noah was a day of normality and a day of ignorance. And so it will be when Jesus returns. But what will it be like?

What are we told concerning what it will be like or what features are there to this day? Well, the very picture of normality that we've looked at, the very picture of a time of ignorance, highlight the fact that when Jesus does return, it will be sudden and unexpected.

In great measure, precisely because everything is going on as normal. Precisely because people have no concern and no knowledge of these things. Indeed, in great measure, even those of us who do have some knowledge concerning these things, for us too, it will be sudden and unexpected because we don't know the day and we don't know the hour.

[16:03] We know there, as we read in Genesis, of the flood from one day to the next. One day it was fine, one day it was clear and bright and sunshine. There was no suggestion of rain.

And yet the next day, the heavens opened and the floods began. It reminds me a little there when there was the great storms. When was it? Back in the late 80s.

Was it Michael Fisher, one of the weather forecasters on the night before the great storm? And he said, somebody's phoned in to the BBC to say that there's going to be a great storm.

Well, don't worry about it. There's going to be nothing. And the poor man is bedeviled with that from then on. The clip's often shown. Well, it had been a bit like that in the day of Noah. No indication of what was to come on the following day.

It was sudden and it was unexpected. And Jesus gives examples in the passage there in Matthew to highlight that fact of the sudden and the unexpected nature of it there in verse 40 and 41.

[17:07] He says, Then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other left.

Focusing not so much on the separation that there is, we'll come to that, but more on the activity that those people are involved in. And the picture again is of normal activity.

Here are people working, they're out in the field, they're at their workplace, doing what they always do. And it will be at such a time that Jesus will return.

And it will be at such a time that people will see him coming in the clouds. A picture of normality and a picture of a sudden and unexpected coming.

If people had known that he was coming, they wouldn't have gone to work. You can be sure of that. If people knew that he was about to come, they wouldn't have gone to their fields, they wouldn't have been grinding their corn. This is a sudden thing. This is an unexpected appearance.

[18:06] And so these are the examples that Jesus gives to emphasize the sudden and unexpected nature of it. As to what is actually being said in terms of one shall be taken and the other left, there's maybe two ways in which we can look at it.

We can say, well, this is a picture of this very fact, that it's sudden, it's unexpected, and there's a dramatic picture given by this kind of language. I think it's perfectly reasonable to take it as more than that and say that what we have here is a literal description of what will happen.

Now, we may have heard talk, especially from across the pond, of a rapture and this idea that Jesus will come secretly and all the believers will be taken up to heaven and all the rest will be left behind.

Now, we don't believe that the Bible gives credence to that kind of perspective. But even though we don't accept that, we don't reject the idea of a rapture of sorts per se, and it's perfectly reasonable from this passage and from also 1st Thessalonians to believe that when Jesus does come, the believers will indeed be taken up in this manner and will meet with Jesus in the clouds and we will be gathered to him there.

And those who are not trusting in Christ will indeed be left behind just as we have it described here. One taken and the other left behind.

[19 : 37] A sudden an unexpected coming. And if we think of our own day or the way in which that might happen, we can think of modern day examples. There will be people there in their offices in the fish bank or at the shop or at the school.

There will be those who will be taken up to be with Jesus and others who will be left behind. Dramatic picture. There will be those there at Nib welding away and one will be taken and the other will be left behind. There will be folk in a queue at Summerfield and one will go and the others will be left behind.

That's what's going to happen. That is what Jesus is telling us here. And however bizarre people may think it to be, however peculiar folk might consider this teaching, this is what Jesus describes as being what will happen on that great and awful day.

Be sudden. It will be unexpected. It will be a time of separation. Now we've already noticed that but I want to focus in on that point more particularly. Again, these two verses, verses 40 and 41 highlight this element very poignantly.

A time of separation when the world, when humanity, when men and women will be divided into two groups. Just two groups. There will be one group who will go to be with their God.

[20 : 54] There will be those who are trusting in Jesus, those whom Jesus describes in the parable that follows as faithful servants. there in verse 45.

He says, Who then is a faithful and wise servant who is doing what his master tells him to do, who is about his master's business.

And it is those who are faithful and wise servants. Those who have seen that in Christ there is a master. A master to be followed, a master to be obeyed, a master to be trusted in.

And those of us who have Jesus as such a master and such a savior. We will be in that one group who will go to be with him. But there will be another group.

There will be that group of those who are left behind. The other ones who were told in verse 51 will be cut asunder and appointed with the hypocrites and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[21 : 55] Those who in this life had no time for God, no time for Christ, no time for following him, no time for having their sin forgiven, no time for recognizing their need of a savior.

And when we think of this separation there may be a temptation to think well isn't this a cruel thing? Isn't this a very vindictive and merciless act on the part of God?

But it's not really that at all. Rather what God is doing and what God will do on this day is he will say that those who have chosen, those who have chosen to live without God will find their choice respected when the great day comes.

God will say that's fine you choose to live without me you deem that you don't need me well I will respect that choice and when the time comes you will indeed be without me and I will take those who in this life have recognized their need of me.

A time of separation. then I want to notice finally what attitude should Christians have in the light of these things.

[23 : 06] I wonder if when I started picking on this subject I wonder what your immediate impression was as to the relevance of this subject. I wonder if your first reaction was well this will be quite an interesting thing to hear about just to hear what ideas David has or what he understands this passage to be speaking about almost a sort of something that's not really very real in the sense of being something that will affect my everyday life but well quite interesting I'm curious what if that was your response because I think that sometimes is the response that we have certainly that I have when we think of these things and yet when Jesus gives this teaching his intention is very much a practical one his intention is very much that this teaching would affect the way people would live in the here and now and it's also important to stress that this teaching is directed in the first instance to Christians he's saying to Christians these are things that you must know of and these are things that must affect the way you live and the way you behave well with that by way of introduction what in the passage do we have that would give us instruction as to what attitude we should have in the light of these things the first thing

I want to suggest is that as believers we should have a longing for the coming of Christ now in fairness as we read these verses in Matthew there's nothing explicitly said that would allow us to make this point there are other verses that would suggest that but in our passage nothing explicitly said but I think as we take the comparison that is given of the days of Noah we can come to this conclusion think of Noah for a moment and as he builds this ark and as he knows that there is a day

coming when the waters will come and the floods will come I wonder what Noah's perspective was on the coming of that day although it was to be and indeed was an awful and a dreadful day a day of destruction and death I still feel that Noah longed for that day I think he longed for that day for this reason not so much because of the safety that he knew he would have not so much that he would be able to sit in his ark and feel very cozy but I think he longed for that day because he knew it would be a day when God was vindicated you see he looked around him and he saw a mass of humanity he thought that

Noah and his God had lost the place he thought that there was a God who was completely irrelevant a God who could be ignored a God who could be treated as a thing of no consequence and Noah's concern is one who walked with God or one who shared God's affections and shared God's hate here was one who wanted to see his God vindicated he wanted to be established beyond any doubt that here was a God who was in control here was a God who did do what he said he would do here was a God who was over all and Noah longed for that day when God would be vindicated as he was on that great and awful day I think we too as we look forward to the coming of Jesus we are maybe prone to look forward to it and long for it because of what it will mean for us as Christians and that's not wrong we want to see him face to face we want to be brought in to that time when there will be no more pain and no more suffering no more tears and that's right and that's proper but I think there ought to be even above that a longing for that day because it will be a day when

God is vindicated a day when the will of Christ is seen by all to be an absolute one a day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess and that ought to be our desire because as we look around and we see God's name being misheard as we see God's day being ignored as we see God's word being trampled upon it ought to be our great concern for a day when all that will cease on a day when all will recognize that there is a God and there is one who is over all and in control and so we long for that day we long for that day when Christ's rule will be finally and completely established and so we long for his coming there's a verse in Titus which actually speaks in these terms and it speaks of believers waiting for that blessed hope waiting for that blessed hope the appearing of Jesus that's in

Titus 2 and verse 13 so we long for his coming but then particularly language that is used in this passage is the language of keeping watch in the light of Christ's coming there in verse 42 Jesus has already said that he will be coming he's already said the fact that it will be unexpected and sudden he's already said that it will be a time when there will be a separation and then he goes on to say therefore watch watch therefore he's saying in the light of these truths there is something that you ought to do and there something is that you ought to watch you ought to keep watch the reason given is that we don't know the hour we can't wait until there's a few days to go and then get ready because we don't know we have to be ready permanently in the light of the fact that it could be any time I think we must have that perception we must have that attitude that it could indeed be any time we may return to

[28 : 59] God's word and legitimately we look at what is said concerning events that may precede the coming of Jesus Christ and we may come to conclusions and we may say well there are certain prophecies that don't appear to have been fulfilled as yet we think of what is said in Romans concerning the end gathering of the Jews and we may come to a legitimate conclusion that in our opinion there is still a day to come when the Jews as a nation will turn to Jesus Christ and we say well that hasn't happened yet and so in consequence Jesus couldn't come today now it's not unreasonable to think in that way and to come to those kind of conclusions but even as we do so I think we must also be aware of our fallibility and how we may make mistakes in our interpretation and we must always have this perception or this attitude that it could be any time it could be tonight it could be tomorrow it will be at a time when we don't expect it and so maybe it'll be at a time when we've worked it out and said oh well it couldn't be now and God will say well it's precisely when you don't think it will be that is when it will be and so for that reason we have to be ready we have to keep watch we have to be prepared day in and day in but what does it mean to keep watch what is involved in well I think we are given an about what is involved in the parables that follow and very simply and not particularly glamorously to keep watch is to be about the master's business you see the servant who is given as an example for us was about his master's business we read there in verse 45 who then is a faithful and wise servant whom the Lord hath made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season blessed is that servant whom his

Lord when he cometh shall find so doing the servant has been given a job to do he has to feed the servants at the due time day in day out give them their breakfast and their lunch and their tea that's what he has to do not very glamorous not very dramatic but that's what the job he's been given to do and as long as he's doing that job then he's ready the master can appear at any time any day any week any month and this servant is doing his job he is about his business and as he is about his business he is ready it's not a case of this servant looking at the road that approaches the household and saying well is he coming is he coming it's not about him having maybe messengers at different points in the road and saying well whenever the master comes let me know because I have to keep watch it's not about that kind of thing it's about being about the father's business that is the way to keep watch I remember there was a we're coming right to the end now but I remember there was a lad in

Peru and at the time of the Gulf War back in 91 he made this song about the Gulf War and basically the gist of the song was that these were signs and the chorus had that Jesus is coming soon and he had seen this Gulf War and he looked at his Bible and about wars and rumours of war and he had come to the conclusion that the return of Christ was imminent and that the Gulf War was a sign of that well that's fair enough that was his conclusion and no doubt he may have thought that in investigating and in considering these things he was keeping watch and being ready for the day the sad reality is that that same man within a few months he had drifted away from the church and he wasn't seen in church and he was going about doing his own thing you see he may have appeared to be someone who was keeping watch he even wrote a song about the coming of the Lord and yet he wasn't about the father's business in the nitty gritty of Monday to Friday he wasn't serving the Lord so he wasn't ready he could write a dozen songs he could write a dozen books about prophecy and about the second coming but if he wasn't about the father's business then he wasn't ready and so with us it's not really a case of being obsessively interested in the signs that will accompany the coming of

Jesus it's not a case of being experts in these things it is a business a case of being about the father's business this is what Jesus says the wise and faithful servant was doing just as he had been told and that is the attitude that we should have of being about our father's business and if we are then we are per se ready for that day yes it will catch us by surprise because we don't know the day and the hour but we'll be ready because we're about the father's business but as we conclude maybe I could ask myself and ask you the question do you long for his coming are you living as we read in Titus sober upright and godly lives in the light of his coming I think when these kind of questions are asked many of us have to recognize that there isn't maybe that intensity of longing maybe very little longing at all concerning these things and we may be asked the question well how do I get from here to there I recognize that

I don't long for the coming of Christ it's not something that I long for in any great measure if that's not true of you then good but if you recognize that you don't long for his coming the Bible would have us long how do we get from being in that situation to being over there being where we are longing but we do have the right attitude