

We're finally back. It's 4 weeks now, since I said we'd be taking this Bible Reading over 2 weeks,, I's just the 2 weeks are spread out a fair bit...

So, last time, we mostly restrained ourselves, to the very first 2 verses. Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God. And in the first 2 verses, He has been addressing the Pharisees. And we discovered that the Kingdom of God has 2 aspects to it – there is the “Now”, and the “Not-yet”. And in the last message, Jesus was talking to the Pharisees about the Kingdom of God “Now”.

And I'm not going to go back over it – If you want to refresh or catch up, you can go to www.bushdisciples.church, click on “sermons”, and you'll find it there.

Today, we're covering VV 22-37. And the topic is still “the Kingdom of God”, but He's no longer talking to the Pharisees – He's now addressing His Disciples.

And He's no longer talking about the Kingdom of God “Now” – He's moved on to the **future** aspect of the Kingdom of God – what we refer to as:

- the “Not-yet”;
- the Kingdom that is coming;
- He's talking about when the Kingdom of God will come in all of its fullness;
- when Jesus returns, and the Day of Judgment arrives.

Now, when it comes to the return of Jesus, and the coming judgment of God, for most of us, we probably feel a bit “torn”

about this. We **long** for Jesus to come. We **long** for His Kingdom to come in all of its fullness, but we're also acutely aware, that on that day (when Jesus arrives), He comes as "Judge". And for all those who have rejected Jesus, there will be no more chances. This is the cut-off.

And so, our hearts grieve for those who are lost...

Is that the way you feel?

I used to feel that way. But as my faith has grown, I've learned to hand that confliction over to my Heavenly Father. You see, our Heavenly Father is much more loving than what you are. And He's much, much, much more loving than what I am.

In Ezekiel 18:23, God says, "I don't get pleasure from the destruction of the wicked – I'd much rather that they repent of sin and live"...ⁱ (That's the Michael Brumpton General Gist version).

And so in faith, I leave it to the Love of God / Wisdom / Justice / Mercy. In faith, we pray for the coming of the Lord Jesus, knowing that God has got it in hand, and Jesus will return at just the right time.

And so, I'm not longer conflicted. I know God has it in hand (my wisdom on timing, won't help), And He cares about the lost more than I do. And so we can rejoice at the coming of Jesus...

But of course, until the day that Jesus returns, if you and I **truly** do love those who are lost (and don't just say we do), we

will be doing everything we can, to share the good news of Jesus with them. We will be taking every opportunity, and we'll be **making** opportunities, to testify to the Name of Jesus, to a world who really don't want to know Him...

And so, let's approach the topic of "the coming of The Day of The Lord" with unanimous anticipation and joy. (That's the way we're meant to).

Righto, so let's get into it:

Jesus turned to His Disciples, and He said: "The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.

Let's talk about persecution.

As we get further into the Gospel of Luke (especially Chapter 21), Jesus is quite open about the persecution that His Disciples will suffer (simply because we are His Disciples).

And **I'm** going to be pretty blunt and say, that "Persecution for the Christian church, is normal.". And when the Christian church **doesn't** suffer, it's usually because it has been changing its message, to appease the world – It dumbs-down the Gospel – It bluntens the offence that the Gospel is. They change the Gospel of Jesus, to fit the prevailing culture of the

day,, because if it's not offensive to our culture, there isn't much persecution.

But here's the thing: The authentic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, has always been **counter**-to-culture. The Kingdom of God, is **not** the Kingdom of this world. Let's not pretend that it is. And when we preach the authentic Gospel of the Kingdom of God, I can guarantee you, that no matter what culture you are in, that culture will not like it.

Why is that? It's probably because the Gospel puts God as No.1, and not man.

- I am not No.1
- My family are not No.1;
- The pursuit of happiness is not No.1;
- the Environment is not No.1;
- Our Country is not No.1;
- Nor is Democracy, No.1...

God is Number 1.... In all things. Nothing comes before Him.

And the simple message, to totally submit to the Lord our God, and to live according to His Good Will, that ain't popular,, in any culture. We need to humble ourselves before Him.

And so, when we do honour God, and when we are genuine in our faith; and unashamed of Jesus; and unashamed of His word, I can guarantee you, there will be persecution.

Things are changing greatly, in our world at the moment. For the last few centuries (at least in our western culture), we have experienced an era of what's known as "Christendom" – where the Christian ethic was so predominant in our culture (at least in some aspects) it was the accepted norm... But let me tell you, "That time has well and truly passed". Our culture is becoming more and more **anti-God** and **anti-Christian**.

And you and I might think that's strange. But you know what? Historically, it's normal. It is normal for Christians to be hated. Jesus told His Disciples, "The world will hate you, but know that they hated me first."ⁱⁱ It is normal for a society to be anti-God. And we can expect to see persecution becoming more and more common within our land.

At the FECA conference (a week ago) I was talking to a Christian counsellor (based in Victoria). And for him, it is now becoming impossible to counsel with Christian values. The anti-discrimination laws of Victoria basically require him (as a counsellor) to affirm the person in whatever destructive sinful lifestyle they've chosen...

And he sees a time in the near future, when he will have to leave his profession...

The Christian church will suffer persecution. And when we suffer persecution, **that**, is when we long to see the days of the Son of Man...

But Jesus said to His Disciples, “You’ll long for it, but you **won’t** see it”... Let me put legs on that.

*I remember when I was a boy, people saying, “Oww, things are getting so bad – Jesus has to come soon.”... Why do we get it into our heads, that when things get bad, **that’s** when Jesus will come. Jesus explicitly said to His Disciples, “You’ll long for it, but you **won’t** see it”.*

In Matthew 24, Jesus talks about big troubles; and wars and rumours of wars; and false prophets and; persecutions... And He says, but the end is not yet...

Yes, it **is** right, to long for the return of Jesus,, and when we are persecuted, it is right to **really** long for the return of Jesus.... But that doesn’t mean that that’s the cue for Him to turn up. **Yes**, be ready for His return, and **pray** for His return, but the fact that things are getting tough, doesn’t mean that it’s about to happen. It could be at any time. It could be when you least expect it. (and we’re going to see that shortly)

So, when things get tough, do **not** be misled. Let me make this very clear: “There will be **no** secret coming of Jesus.”

While we were on holidays, we stopped over in Port Germein. And we walked out on the jetty – I think it was 1.3km long. And when we were walking back, we heard the rumble of

thunder. And we looked up in the sky, and there was no lightning. There wasn't even any clouds. It turned out that over the other side of the Gulf, there is an army firing range, where they blow stuff up, and that's what we were hearing.

But think of the night sky, when there's a storm happening, you can see lightning from miles away. And Jesus said, "That's what it's going to be like when I come back." **as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.**

Now, there are many different perspectives and teachings about what to expect in the end times. And I'm not going to cover them all, but I do need to correct something.

In my first car (WB Holden ute), I had a sticker on the glove box that said "Passengers ride in this vehicle at their own risk. The driver could disappear at any moment."

It was a great conversation starter with hitch hikers... What's that about? "Oh, when Jesus returns, He's going to take all the Christians out of the world, so I could suddenly disappear and you might have to grab the steering wheel" ...

And that's what I used to believe, (pre-tribulation rapture) (The belief that **before** the great tribulation – **before** the great time of suffering, Jesus will secretly return and all the Christians will be raptured (snatched out of the world) so we don't have to go through this time of suffering).

Now, the reason I **used** to believe that, is because I went along with the crowd.

It is by far the most popular teaching coming out of the US, and being imported and regurgitated in Australia. It is the most common teaching in Pentecostal churches and in Dispensationalist churches. And it's a teaching that has been popularised by the books and movies of the "Left Behind" series.

And it sounds nice doesn't it. The Christians are taken out of the world **before** the big trouble - "*Phew. Glad we avoided that*".

But when I really started reading my Bible, it doesn't fit. In God's Word, we are continually confronted with teaching after teaching from Jesus, preparing His disciples to **endure** the great tribulation.

Then, when I looked into the teaching itself, I realised that historically, it is a very new teaching. Up until the 1800's, it was almost unheard of. Up until the 1800's, almost the entire Christian church understood that we have to be prepared to endure the great tribulation.

Now, when there is a new teaching that becomes popular in the church, always be very suspicious of it. Especially when it doesn't fit Scripture.

And here, is a case-in-point – Jesus makes it so clear: When Jesus returns, there's not going to be anything secret about it. It will happen in an instant. And it will be universally visible – like lightning across the sky – you're not going to miss it...

And so, effectively Jesus is saying:

1. Don't look around;
2. Don't look forward; and
3. Don't look back.

1. Don't look around. Don't listen to false teachers. Don't listen to false prophets, who say, "Come and have a look – Jesus is here. You don't want to miss Him."

2. Don't look forward. Don't try and catch the date. Don't decide "Oww, things are pretty bad, He's gotta come back in the next month or so..."

When Jesus returns, it won't be a gradual thing – it will be instant, and it will be cataclysmic... Like lightning from one side of the sky to the other.

First Jesus would suffer.

✓ Check! That's done.

And He would be rejected by this generation... That just seems to go on and on.

- It happened in the days of Jesus;
- It happened in the days of the early church; and
- It's happening today.
The word of Jesus is being proclaimed into the world, and yet He is rejected.

Anyway, some folk put a lot of time into trying to figure out when Jesus is going to return, but the whole point is, when Jesus does return, it will be totally unexpected.

It's going to be like the days of Noah.

There Noah was, building his ark. And then stocking the ark and loading the ark. What were the rest of the world doing? Everything just proceeded as normal. They were making the best of life.

- Eating;
- drinking;
- Celebrating;
- Marrying
(starting out in life together)....
- Pursuing happiness
(with scant regard to God)...

And that's what it will be like with the return of Jesus. The moment Jesus returns, will be no different to yesterday. It will be no different to a year ago. Don't look forward and try to work out what day it's going to be – it will be totally unexpected.

And He gives a second example – it will be just like the days of Lot. (That's when God rained judgment upon the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.) **they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building ...**

- Everything was going along as-per-normal
- fully expecting that life would continue on as it always had.

- Plans for the future.
 - You don't build for today – you build for tomorrow.
 - You don't marry for today – you marry for your future together.
 - You don't plant a crop or plant a tree for today – you plant it because you expect to be around when harvest time comes...

But what happened? Judgment fell upon them. God rained fire and sulphur upon the city.

Can you see the very clear picture, that Jesus is painting of His return?

- Things will be going along, totally normal;
- People will be enjoying life; and
- Preparing for their future...

- But when Jesus returns, it will be instant, and universally visible.
- The whole world will see it, and know that Jesus has come.

And this bit is really important:

- When Jesus returns, there is no gap. Things will be going along as-per-normal, and then instantly the Day of Judgment arrives.

Just as in the days of Noah – things were going along as normal, and then the door of the ark was shut.

Just as in the days of Lot – things were going along as normal, and fire and sulphur rained down upon the city.

When Jesus returns, it will be instantly too late to make a last-minute confession of faith...

So, don't look around and try and work out when it's going to be. Make the decision today, to give your life to Jesus, and to live for Him.

3. Don't look back.

As Disciples of Jesus, we hold very loosely, to things of this world. I'm the sort of bloke that, when I start something, I want to finish it.

And I don't think I've ever told anyone this, but when I left my job and uprooted our family to go to Bible College, something that was always in the back of my mind, was, "What if Jesus returns, the day before I graduate?" What a waste this would be.

What would be the point of uprooting my family, and putting in all of that time and effort, preparing for a ministry that may never eventuate...

And when we think about it, there's always things we want to see mature:

- To see our children grow into men and women;

- To enjoy the retirement we've worked so hard to save up for;
- To see that newly developed country produce its first crop;
- To drive the new car you've had on order for the last 6 months;

- To tick a few things off the bucket list....

There's no future in that.

When Jesus returns, don't look back. Don't think about the things you could have done, or the possessions you like to take with you...

For a Christian, there is no such thing as having a "go-bag" ready, for when Jesus returns – There isn't any going back for your photo albums or your favourite scrap books...

And in essence, for Disciples of Jesus, even before Jesus returns – from the moment we make the decision to follow Him, we are making a commitment, that there is no going back.

Jesus gives the example of Lot's wife.

When Lot and his family fled the city, the instruction was, "Don't look back." Lot's wife did look back, and she was caught up in the judgment. She was turned into a pillar of salt.

Jesus said: V³³ **Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.**

And I'm here to tell you, that what is true for a Disciple of Jesus today, carries through, right through to the day that Jesus returns.

Even today, there are Christians, who will be given a choice: "If you want to live, deny Jesus." There are Christians in Australia today, who will be given a choice: "Follow the Law and prosper, or speak God's truth and suffer".

The choice is always before us: Do it the world's way, and preserve your life. Or, do it God's way, and have eternal life. ... **whoever loses his life will keep it.**

When the Day of Judgment comes, we have a great and certain hope. We will be saved. Why? Because we are in Christ Jesus. We belong to Him.... If we do not deny Him, He won't deny us.

So, don't look back. Don't crave the things of the world; Don't hide your faith to be more popular in the world. Embrace Jesus, wholeheartedly. And follow Him, unashamedly. Don't give Jesus half-a-life. He deserves much more than that. We give it all.

Because, when Jesus returns, there's going to be a great separation.

V³⁴ I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left."

For those who follow the pre-tribulation rapture theory, they say "There it is there". Before the big trouble, all the Christians are taken out of the world. But the thing is, in the Gospel of Luke, it's actually left a bit ambiguous. We're not told if it is the Good or the Evil who are taken. We're not told if they're taken to glory or to judgment.

And in Matthew's account, it is actually less ambiguous. In Matthew's account (Chapter 24), "being taken" is an image of judgment. In the days of Noah: ³⁹ ... they were unaware 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 will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

In the Gospel of Matthew, those who are taken, are clearly taken in judgment...

But whether it be the Gospel of Matthew, or the Gospel of Luke, the clear message, is there is a great separation. Those whom you work with, may have a different fate to you. Those whom you **live** with, may have a different fate to you. It is critical, to be on the right side of this.

If being a Disciple of Jesus is tough;

If it means for us, a life of:

- persecution;
- hardship;
- poverty;
- rejection by this world;

Why would we do it???

We do it because we love Jesus, and our hope is in Him. And on the Day of Judgment, when the great separation happens, we won't be on the wrong side of it...

Righto, so the Disciples heard all this, and they asked a question: "Where, Lord?"

*Somebody once said to me, "I don't want to know **when** I'm going to die. I just want to know **where** I'm going to die. And I will never go there..."*

I don't know if that's behind the Disciple's question, but Jesus said: "**Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.**"

Where there's a dead carcass, the crows circle before they land, and the Wedge-Tail Eagle circles for a bit before he lands... You've seen it, haven't you?

In other words, just as obvious as the appearing of Jesus, like lightning from one side of the sky to the other, The Day of Judgment will be obvious. But the point is, by the time it happens, it will be too late to get ready for it.

So, when Jesus returns:

- it won't be on our schedule;
- There will be times when we want Him to come sooner.

But when Jesus returns:

- it won't be on our schedule;
- It will be unexpected.
Life will be continuing on as-per-normal, and it will suddenly happen.
- It will be instant.
There will be an instant cut-off;
- It will be universal, and universally visible.
There won't be anything hidden. There won't be anything secret about it.
- And there will be an instant and great separation.
Some will be taken to judgment;
Some will be taken to Glory.

So:

1. Don't look around;
Don't follow false prophets or false teachers.
Don't believe anyone who tells you "Jesus is here; Jesus is there".
2. Don't look forward;
Don't try and guess when Jesus is coming. When He comes, it will be totally unexpected.

Make the decision today, to commit to Jesus – to give your life to Him – to follow Him.

and:

3. Don't look back.

Keep on following Jesus. Even if you have to lose your life to be a follower of Jesus, those who lose their life, gain it. Even if you lose your freedom for following Jesus; or if the world treats you as an idiot for the faith you hold,, on the day Jesus returns, there will be glory and honour; and life; and great joy.

Let me ask a question:

If you are **not** a Disciple of Jesus, what's holding you back?
Be ready.

Salvation, is the free gift of God. It's not the good people who get to heaven; It's not the nice people who get to heaven...
On the Day of Judgment, the only ones who will be saved, are those who have surrendered their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ – those who have repented of sin, and experienced the forgiveness of Jesus.

And I invite you to do that now.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,

The word "Lord", is not merely a name – it is a title.

I want you to be “My Lord/Master”.

I submit myself to You.

I have done many things wrong,
but I understand that the greatest sin,
is to reject You.

Forgive me of my sin.
I no longer reject You.
I receive You as my Lord;
My King;
My Saviour.

Forgive me of my sin, I pray.

And I thank You,
that Your Word tells us,
that as far as the East is from the West,
That’s how far you have removed my sin.

And Lord, we long for the day of Your return.

Until that time, and on that day,
help us to not look back.

Help us to hold loosely,
to all of the things that this world has to offer.

Knowing that everything is temporary,
But You are eternal;
And the sure and certain hope we have in You,
is eternal.

And so we follow You today,
and may we follow You tomorrow.

And Lord, give us a love
for those who are not yet saved.
Give us a love that emboldens us,
to unashamedly share the Name of Jesus
with 'the lost', no matter what the cost.

And we pray,
"Come Lord Jesus"
Claim Your throne, King Jesus.

We long for that day.
Amen.

ⁱ Ezekiel 18:21-24 (ESV)

²¹ "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ²² None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be

remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live.

²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? ²⁴ But when a righteous

person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.

ii John 15:18-21 (ESV)

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.