

Newsletter 21st November 2021

D Fennell will be bringing us the Word this week

Prayers of the people

- Please continue to pray for those who are unwell and having treatment may it go well for them. Pray for those who are grieving, having employment and emotional difficulties. May God be with them and give them strength at this time and our Christian community support them.
- Pray for Jill Dunstan as she recovers from surgery on her shoulder, may it go well.
- Pray for our leaders as they plan to open the country from restrictions of Covid19, may the right decisions be made, and our country be safe. Pray also for the world as the countries are struggling with Covid19.
- Pray for the Barnabas Fund, Compassion and Open Doors who are working throughout the world to help those who are persecuted and in need. May those who are doing God's work in difficult circumstances be kept safe.

Notices

Evening gathering – Sunday 7th October 5 pm

- Watching Episode 6 of “The Chosen”

Pastoral care “Munch”

Following church on the 21st of November a “Munch” (morning tea and lunch) fundraiser for the Pastoral Care Workers will be held. \$15 a single, \$40 a family. Please contact Judy Kreek (0429999256) or Yvonne Hogarth (0417815678) for details or to offer assistance.

AGM Congregational Meeting 21st of November:

AGM will be at 2pm. There will be an agenda and reports available to be read prior to the AGM.

If you have any questions prior to the meeting please contact members of the Church Council, Congregation Secretary Carol Lawrie, or Bill Cobbledick Chairman of the Congregation.

Men's Fellowship Saturday 20 November, 5:30 pm, at Ashley and Simone Owen's place. Shepherds Cave, 270 Cadgee Road, Naracoorte “First right after the creek crossing on the bend”

Dan Fennell will speak on “The Run Also Rises – the story of Jacob”

Please bring your own meat, salad, and drink. Sweets supplied!

Roster: The roster for the next quarter will be drawn up soon. People are needed to help. Please see Andrew or Oriel and volunteer to serve so that our Sunday church service and morning tea runs smoothly. **Everyone** has a gift from God to help his church. Please See Pastor Andrew if you need advice as to what your gift may be!

Children's Christmas presentation Service

Come and join in Celebrating Jesus Birthday!

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD!



When: December 5th

Time: 9.30am

Place: Naracoorte U.C.

Join The Party for Morning Tea following the Service

Cleaner: Looking for a cleaner to fill in for 2 weeks after Christmas /New Year. Please let Leanne or Peter Lawrie know if you can help. Thanks

Church Gardeners Required: Jill and Eugene have “retired” as of the 1st of November. We thank them for the many years of gardening they have given us. If one or several people would like to work together to keep our church well-presented that would be great.

Wesley Hall: Please note Wesley Hall will be booked between the 12th of December until the 17th of , December for Christmas hamper distribution.

Name Tags and Updates: Please use the form at the back of the church if you would like a name tag or need to update your email or phone number to get the newsletter or be able to be contacted.

Tithe a tin Pray a Packet: the support that the congregation gives this worthy project is very much appreciated by those who are in need during these difficult times. There is a list of suggestions in the box and on the notice board in Blackwell Hall. Thank you very much

Church Service: Due to Covid 19 the guidelines for Sunday are as follows.

- Masks must be worn
- 1/2m² distancing applies (**152** persons in the church)
- Singing allowed with masks on.
- Morning Tea under covid 19 guidelines
- Sunday School is on!

Please share any news or concerns you may have so we may celebrate or support you in any way we can.

Mid Week Bible Reading:

Matthew 24:1-44 Part 2

Last week in the midweek Bible reading I tried to explain what Jesus is saying to his disciples in these verses. Jesus had just announced the coming destruction of the temple and his disciples had asked him three questions (Matthew 24:3):

- When will this happen?
- What will be the sign of Jesus' coming?
- What will be the sign of the end of the age?

I have explained that in the discussion with his disciples, Jesus talks about two "comings". The first is described in verses 24:4-35 where Jesus "comes" to God the Father in triumph. Jesus, the one that the world condemned, God has declared him innocent and the King. Jesus is the new Temple. God's glory has left the old temple and as Jesus tells the people of Jerusalem **your** temple is left to **you** desolate. (23:38). Jesus gives his disciples some clear directions on what to look for as this event approaches ("the abomination that causes desolation", (Matt 24:15, and Luke 21:20), and describes what his disciples must do – that is "run"! (Matt 24:16).

Then in verses 36-44 Jesus talks about the end of the age, and his second coming to earth, (rather than heaven) and he makes it clear that, in contrast to his coming to the Father in glory, his second coming to earth will happen without warning. Christians must be always ready and prepared for this and be found busy doing the things Jesus has asked us to do. (43-46)

In this midweek Bible reading I want to concentrate on verses 9-14 and 29 as **highlighted** below.

Matthew 24:1-44

English Standard Version

24 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

⁹ “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

¹⁵ “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. ²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

³² “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁶ “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For 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 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. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake 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.

I am going to argue that the events as described in the highlighted text do not refer to Christ's end-of-the-age second coming but refer to events associated with, or prior to, the destruction of Jerusalem, including the Temple, and the consequent vindication of Jesus.

Verses 9-14

In the first section, verse 9 Jesus describes coming persecution and martyrdom. The equivalent passage in Marks gospel (13:9) reads: ⁹ “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.” This describes the kind of things we read in Acts 4, 5 and 6 where apostles were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, some apostles were arrested and flogged, and some (including Stephen and James) were killed. In Acts 12:1 and 23:24-35 we read of apostles standing before kings and governors.

Verses 10-12 describes the kind of thing we read of in many of Paul’s letters where false prophets were leading astray many in the young church. Read in particular 2 Timothy 1:15 where Paul complains that “all those in Asia have turned against me” and 4:10 “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world”.

In verse Matthew 24:14 Jesus describes wide spread preaching of the gospel. ¹⁴ “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the **whole world** as a testimony to all nations, **and then the end** will come”.

The Greek word translated “whole world” is *oikoumene*. It really means the *then known world*, the Roman world. For example, it also is used in Luke 2:1 “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that **all the world** (*oikoumene*) should be registered. (I don’t think they got the message in Tasmania for example!). And again, it is used in Acts 11:28 where there was a great famine over **all the world** in the days of emperor Claudius. And again, the same word is used in Acts 24:25 where Paul is accused of stirring up riots across the **whole world**. Through the efforts of the apostles and their disciples, the *oikoumene* (whole world) that Jesus is talking about had certainly heard the gospel preached before AD 70, **the end** of the temple and Jerusalem which came with the Roman armies, and which is “the end” that Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24, verses 4-35.

This “end” would truly be a great tribulation. In the 5-month siege prior to the Roman armies overrunning the defences, disease was rife, and starvation reduced people to cannibalism. Some 1.1 million Jews were killed, many thousands by crucifixion, some 100,000 were marched into exile as slaves.

Verse 29

In order to understand these verses as a first century Jewish disciple would, first read the verses 29-31 again (see second lot of **blue text** above) and then read Ezekiel 32:7-8, 15:

⁷ When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens
and make their stars dark;
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon shall not give its light.

⁸ All the bright lights of heaven
will I make dark over you,
and put darkness on your land,
declares the Lord God...

When I make the land of Egypt desolate,
and when the land is desolate of all that fills it,
when I strike down all who dwell in it,
then they will know that I am the Lord.

And read Isaiah 13:9-10 where he writes about the coming destruction of Babylon:

⁹ Behold, the day of the Lord comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,

to make the land a desolation
and to destroy its sinners from it.

¹⁰ For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light.

And Isaiah 34:4-5 describing the destruction of Edom:

⁴ All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.

All their host shall fall,
as leaves fall from the vine,
like leaves falling from the fig tree.

⁵ For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;
behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom,
upon the people I have devoted to destruction.

The point is that this is apocalyptic writing and way of speaking, a description not of what is happening in the heavens but what large scale political, economic and military upheaval is happening on earth. The stars didn't actually rot away. Nor did the sky roll up like scroll. The disciples, steeped in the Old Testament scriptures would have understood what Jesus was trying to tell them in Matthew 24:29-31. The world was not going to end in their lifetimes, but momentous and tragic things would indeed happen.

The Temple is destroyed, the judgement of God falls on the city, Jesus' followers escape, and Jesus, the innocent Son of God, betrayed and crucified, is seen by all to be vindicated.

Conclusion:

The whole of Matthew 24 is about Jesus. It is about his mission, his death and resurrection and about his ultimate vindication. It is about his prophesy to his disciples regarding what was going to happen in their life times about Jerusalem and the temple, what to do as that day approaches, and how to be ready when he comes again at the "end of the age" – that is the end of this age in which he reigns in heaven, gloriously at the right hand of the Father with all power and authority.

It is this second return that is most relevant to us, a return that we are told will come without warning, "like a thief in the night", and at which we must be found during our job. We are given two clear commands by Jesus in regard to each other and in regard to the world. The first is to love each other as Christ has loved us. The second is to pass on the good gospel news to people everywhere, including the next generation, discipling and baptising in the name of the triune God – Father, Son and Spirit. We would best be about these things rather than engaging in endless and fruitless end-time speculation and imagining that we can read the signs. We can't, and we have been told exactly that.

Andrew