

How to Live your Days in Light of a Day you Don't Know

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[0 : 00] Lord, you say heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.! And so we pray now in these few moments that you would lift our hearts and our eyes to you seated! in heaven at God's right hand, that we would fix our ears upon your words and that our hearts would take them in, that we might stay awake, Lord, in every sense to what you are saying to us today.

For this we ask in your name. Amen. Well, I don't know about your house. In our house, we've got two advent calendars on the go. At some point this week, they both became communal advent calendars.

I think I've only had about one chocolate so far this advent. But there's great excitement to open the door each day, number seven today. And with each little window, we can see that we're getting closer and closer to the day, to Christmas Day. We're basically just counting up to 25, aren't we? And when we get to 25, well, then the day is here. But imagine, if you can, an advent calendar where the doors don't have numbers. And in fact, you don't even know how many doors there are. You have no idea which one is the last one. You just open a door each day and it might be today. Or it might be tomorrow.

It might be the second from last one. Or the last one might be next week. It could be next year. In fact, you could go your whole life long, opening a door each day and not get to the last one.

[1 : 51] Let's call that a second advent calendar. Now, I think it would be much easier to get tired of having an advent calendar like that than your normal advent calendar. Right? We know in theory that with each door, we are one day closer, right? But how many days in a row could you sustain that anticipation and excitement before you began to get worn out and exhausted of expecting that it might be today?

Which is kind of another way, isn't it, of saying that looking forward to Christ's second advent, his second coming, is not as easy as looking forward to celebrating his first advent, his first coming. And one reason for that is that, well, we know how long we have to wait till Christmas. 18 more sleeps, if you didn't know. But we do not know how long we will have to wait for Christ's return. Last Sunday, Ben got us started with the fifth teaching block in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus is teaching his disciples that he is not only to be the crucified king and the risen king, but the returning king. Remember, they asked him about when the temple would end and what to look out for. And Jesus takes the opportunity to begin telling them how the world will end and what to look out for. We heard him say last time that there would be wars, natural disasters, persecution, betrayal, that the gospel would go out to the ends of the earth, but that those were just the signs that the end was still to come, that the tremors before the earthquake. Because when the end properly comes, says Jesus, well, then everyone will know it. Because he will appear in heaven and come on the clouds with power and great glory. He will return. Advent is a season of hope, where we as Christians learn to look forward. Just as God's people in the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of the Christ. So we look back and we celebrate his first coming in humility to be born as a child.

But so too do we look forward in hope to his second coming in glory and great power. Advent teaches us to do that. And our passage helps us today because Jesus teaches us as his followers how to deal with not knowing when that day will be. If you like the passage today, it could be the instructions on the back of your second advent calendar telling you how to wait. Because Jesus wants us to know how to live our days in light of a day we don't know. How to live our days in light of a day we don't know. And he begins, doesn't he, with that starting point that no one knows, the day of Jesus' return. Just see that in verse 36. He says, but concerning that day and hour, no one

knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father only. Now I wonder, can you guess what all of these dates have in common? 22nd of October, 1844, 21st of June, 1982, 6th of September, 1994, 6th of April, 2000, 9th of June, 2019, the 8th of October, 2025. What do you think?

[5 : 53] They are all dates that people have predicted when Jesus will return. In fact, I discovered there's a whole Wikipedia page dedicated to this, predictions of Jesus' second coming. Now, do you know what else they all have in common? They're all wrong. Every single one of them. Brothers and sisters, Jesus could not have been clearer that no one knows the day of his return. So here's straight off the page, take home point, write this down, remember it. If someone claims to know when Jesus will come back, do not listen to them. Ignore it. Do not listen. Don't be taken in. The disciples asked Jesus when these things would happen. What's the very first thing he says in reply? Just turn back the page, put your eyes on verse 4. What does he say? The very first thing. Jesus answered them, see that no one leads you astray. Have you ever thought it's weird that despite the fact these predictions have a zero percent success rate, that people still want to give it a go? Why is that?

Well, it's because even though they're wrong every time, they have a much higher success rate in taking people in, getting followers. Friends, people who try to predict the date of Jesus's return are trying to deceive Christians to follow not Jesus, but them. And sadly, sometimes it works. And Jesus is not surprised by that. He says they will lead many astray. But here we have in front of us his crystal clear words. No one knows the day or hour. So friends, let him have the last word. Let that be true.

And everyone a liar. Listen to Jesus. Let no one lead you astray. Now, so far so good, you say. No one knows. I can see that. But what does Jesus mean when he says, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only? Now, if you come back tonight, which I would encourage you to do, you will hear Donald teach that Jesus is God. We're having three bites at the middle bit of the 19 creed, which begins with these words. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. So if he's Lord and the Son of God, how can he not know the day of his own return? Lots of ink and blood even has been spilled over that question, because on first hearing, you could think, couldn't you, it means Jesus is not properly God. If the Son doesn't know, then does that make the Son less than the Father? Is Jesus not equal with God? Some people have said that, namely a monk called Arius, who was condemned as a heretic in the fourth century, and whose followers today are across the road in the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. But is that what Jesus is saying?

No. He is not saying he is less than God. He is saying that he is truly human.

This leads us right into the mystery of the incarnation, doesn't it? God the Son becoming man, that when he came down to be conceived in the womb, he did not become any less God, but he took to himself everything that it means to be a human being apart from our sin.

[9 : 49] And we can't get our heads fully around that. But that is where the New Testament leaves us, that from the point he was conceived in the womb, he has had two distinct natures in his one person, creature and creator. And what he's saying here is that insofar as he is like us, in every way apart from sin, he stands with us in our not knowing the day or hour of his return.

Now when you think about it, isn't that more precious than if he had said, well, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but of course I know, and the Father knows, but we're not going to tell you.

In one sense that is true, but that's not why he came. Not to lord his greatness over us, but to humbly and gently stand with us and kneel down to serve us in our weakness.

The omniscient one who knows all things and to whom nothing is a mystery, came willingly to share in our ignorance of when things will happen.

He, to whom all things are certain, took to himself a creaturely uncertainty about the final day. What a comfort that is.

[11 : 14] If we are unsettled or upset at the idea that the world will one day suddenly end, that the Son of God entered into our not knowing and stood calmly with us in it.

He is not upset. He is not unsettled. He is with us. No one knows, he said, apart from the Father, who of course Jesus has taught us is our merciful and loving Heavenly Father.

Friends, we have nothing to fear. But every day it's getting nearer, you say, so shouldn't we be more anxious about it with every passing day? Well, no, says Jesus.

You don't need to worry the nearer it gets because it will happen so suddenly. Just look down at verse 37. Verse 38.

Life will go on as it is, up until the very end. In the same way that life went on as normal the days before the flood. The big food shop.

[12:47] After work drinks, family tea time, parties, proposals, weddings. It will all be happening and the sky will split open and Jesus will come down in his glory.

Why wouldn't we be in church? Because we do not know the day or hour. We will be as unaware as the people who lived before the flood.

One day it was clouds and a sunshine on the weather app. The next day the flood came and swept them all away. And clearly it's not just the world out there who will be unaware of that hour.

But Christians too. Jesus says there you'll be at work with your colleagues or maybe at home sorting some stuff out with friends or family. Two men will be in the field.

Two women milling flour. One will be taken and one left. I take it that taken is speaking about that gathering in of his people that Jesus describes in verse 31.

[13:52] Gathering the elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other. So left, I take it, is not having been gathered. Not one of his people.

His point is that the final separation of God's people from the world will come like that. There will not be an all-night vigil setting up camps in the wilderness.

People won't have their binoculars out trying to get the first glimpse of him. He will simply appear.

His people will be gathered and that will be the end. As sudden and unexpected as that.

And so friends, what point is there in getting anxious about when it will be? Because we won't know it's happening until it's happening. So says the one who is coming.

No one knows the day or the hour. And so what are we supposed to do with that? Well, Jesus goes on to teach us we're therefore to be ready whenever he comes.

[14:56] Here's our second point then. Stay awake for when he comes. See that in verse 42. Therefore, he says, stay awake.

For you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 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.

So we don't know what day or time Jesus is coming. But we do know what we would do if we did know. Imagine you're walking home and outside your door there are two men standing there.

And as you get closer, you overhear what they're speaking about. One of them says, meet you back here at 2 a.m. You bring the crowbars and I'll bring the van.

Now what would you do? You would triple lock the doors, phone the police, go and stay with a friend. Even with all that, you would probably be awake at 2 a.m., wouldn't you?

[16:00] You'd hardly sleep. It would be really foolish to have overheard those guys talking about robbing you. And said, they probably won't be back.

And not do anything about it. Make any preparation and go on with your life as usual. Now Jesus is using a metaphor here, isn't he? His return is not exactly like being burgled.

His coming back is a very good thing. Not a criminal act. But in the sense that both are things that you would want to be ready for, Jesus is reasoning from the lesser to the greater.

If you definitely knew that you were going to be burgled, what difference would it make whether you knew what time they were coming or not? If anything, you'd put even more permanent security in place if you didn't know when they were coming.

You'd live in a constant state of readiness to be burgled. So with Jesus' return, if we would want to get ourselves ready for the day that we knew he was coming back, well, why therefore wouldn't we be ready every day in a state of constant preparation, given that we don't know which day he's coming?

[17:17] Now, you can't really argue with that logic, can you? The question, I think, is, is that how we live?

Friends, are we ready for the day of Jesus' return? I don't know any Christian who would deny that Jesus will one day come in glory, or indeed that he could come even tomorrow, today.

But at a functional level, I wonder, do many of us live as if that were true? And I don't mean by that living in outright sin and rebellion, but living spiritually on autopilot, spiritually in neutral.

What does Jesus mean when he says stay awake? Well, I take it he means fixing our eyes on his future return and so living fully for him now in the present.

It's much easier for us, isn't it, to stay awake for things that we can see coming up in the diary, that we know when they're going to happen, the work meeting, the doctor's appointment, the exam, Christmas, the school show, the eating, the drinking, the proposals, the weddings.

[18:37] We say, don't we, if we can make it through X, then everything will be okay. If I can get through my exams, if I can make it to the end of the year, if I can push through this illness, then life will get easier.

And the year will turn and we'll say, this is the year, this is the year I graduate, this is the year I get married, this is the year the baby comes, this is the year we plant the church. Our calendars are bursting full of dates, aren't they, for things to happen.

Some things we look forward to, some things we dread. But our default, isn't it, is to get our heads down and live in that zone from meeting to appointment to drop off to party to bed and the next morning.

We get through the week to the weekend, we get through the month to the break, we get through the year to Christmas. Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is saying that his return overshadows all of that.

I'm sure we've all played this game at the beach, being chased by the waves. Haven't we done that? We get nearer and nearer to the sea, and then at the last moment, when those kind of foamy ripples come, we run back up and they chase us up the beach.

[19:57] And then we dip our toes in, we paddle and the water comes up to our ankles. Well, Jesus is saying that every other date in our diary is like those foamy ripples chasing us up the beach compared to the towering tsunami of his final return.

Friends, if your head is drooping today and your eyes are fixed on the next thing, the next thing, the next thing, Jesus says, wake up, lift your head, look forwards, the biggest thing that will ever happen to you and to this universe is coming at an hour you do not expect.

If you know it's coming and you don't know when it will be, well, doesn't that put everything else, that the meetings, the parties, exams, deadlines, weddings, into perspective?

To put it a different way, if you knew Jesus was coming back this afternoon, is there anything coming up that you'd be disappointed that you didn't get to do? Jesus, if you could just wait to save us until after that, then that will be okay.

Friends, if there is, the returning king says, wake up, wake up to reality, look up, fix your eyes on the horizon of this age and see his coming on the clouds with power and great glory.

[21:29] Now, I don't think this necessarily means we have to clear our diaries. It doesn't make all of those things unimportant. Not at all. But it should make us, I think, reflect on what we think is important in this life.

How we spend our time. There's a story about a preacher called George Whitefield. He was asked once what he would do if he knew that Jesus was coming back next week.

And in response, he took his diary out of his bag, he opened it, and he read out what he had planned for the coming week. I wonder, friends, could you do the same this morning?

Does the use of your time, your evenings, your weekends, reflect the reality that the king is coming at a time you do not expect? Can people look at your life today and see that you are living for something not of this world?

That you have planned your time, ready for a promised future that all your hope is set upon? If you want to be ready when he comes, brothers and sisters, it is time to get ready now and stay ready and awake.

[22:43] For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Be awake when he comes. Because finally, Jesus leaves us with a question.

What will he find you doing on that day? Jesus finishes our passage by speaking about two ways to respond to what he's said by telling us about two different servants.

A faithful and wise servant, verse 20, 45, and a wicked servant, verse 48. And we see the faithful and wise servant patiently carries out the work the master has given to him, feeding and caring for the household.

And when the master comes back, that's exactly what he finds him doing. And so that servant is blessed, says Jesus, and set over all his possessions. By contrast, though, we see the wicked

servant says, my master is delayed.

He grows tired of waiting, working patiently for the master. And in fact, he begins to act as if he were in charge, beating his fellow servants, eating and drinking with the wrong crowd.

[23 : 58] When the master comes back, that's what he finds him doing. And he recuts him in pieces, puts him with the hypocrites in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So who are these servants speaking about? What response is he looking for here? Well, on one level, Jesus is speaking right now to the twelve, to the disciples, who would in time come to have a level of leadership over his household, his church, between his first and second comings.

So when Jesus speaks about a servant being set over his household, I think he has something of that responsibility in view in his church.

So at that level, we could think of this as a warning for church leaders or for anyone with responsibility for others in the church. How we see ourselves as leaders, as those who do, who have responsibility, says Jesus, flows directly from our eschatology.

Did we ever think our eschatology was so important, our doctrine, our thinking about the end? But isn't that the difference between the way these two servants lead?

[25 : 19] And serve in God's household. The faithful and wise servant keeps serving the household as the master would have it served for as long as he is away, waiting patiently for his return.

But what does the wicked servant say? My master is delayed. He's taking too long. Perhaps buried behind that complaint is the doubt is he ever really coming back?

And so he starts making up the rules himself, running the household not in the way the master would have it run, but in a way that serves himself. Friends, here is a warning that leaders in the church who stop being servants of the church, they forget that they are one day going to have to give an answer to the head of the church.

church. And so we who lead at whatever level need to ask what will he find us doing to his people when he comes serving them or using them.

At another level though, this speaks to us all. At the time scale that we think we live in, our thinking about the end and Jesus' return will shape everything about how we live.

[26 : 40] faith. Peter says in his second letter that in the last days people will make fun of our hope. Where is the promise of his coming?

They will say your master is delayed. And friends, doesn't that sound so familiar in Aberdeen, in our schools, our workplaces, our lecture theatres, perhaps even our homes, that is the air we breathe. Think about going out the doors today and saying in public, Jesus is coming back and it could be today. How does that feel? The atmosphere of our world beyond these four walls makes it hard to say that, hard to believe that.

But brothers and sisters, if you ever find yourself thinking or saying to yourself, my master is delayed, is he ever coming? Where is the promise of his coming?

something. Get ready for your life to show it. Get ready for life to become all about you. Get ready to start pushing and shoving to get your own way.

[27 : 51] Get ready to start indulging all your secret desires and lusts, because if he's not really coming or not soon enough, then that's all life is ultimately about, me getting what I want.

Get ready to stop caring, feeding, serving others. Get ready to start using, manipulating, beating down others. But be warned, because that life, that way of life is built on a lie.

He's not coming back. And when it's exposed and he comes at a time you're not expecting, what will he find you doing? What will he say to you? Where will he put you?

wake up, stay awake. And friends, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here today, you might be thinking, even probably thinking, this all sounds a bit out there, sounds a bit mad and a bit crazy to say, but before you write this off, just look how high the stakes are, the faithful and wise servant, blessed by the master and set over all he has, but the wicked servant, he will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Remember, this is Jesus speaking, the Jesus who came in love to be humbly born in a manger, the Jesus who spent time with outcasts and was mocked and scorned for it, the Jesus who bent down to wash his disciples' feet.

[29 : 37] This is not an angry and bitter person always nitpicking, always criticizing. This is the most loving, the most humble human being ever to have lived on the face of the earth, and he says the stakes are too high not to be ready for his return.

What will he find you doing on the day when he comes? Friends, wake up, let's stay awake, and let's live all of our days in light of that day when he will come again in power and in great glory on a day that we do not know.

Let's pray together that we would be ready. Let's pray. Lord, we set all our hope on the day of your coming in great power and glory.

Lord, we confess in so many ways our unreadiness for that day. Lord, that even as we look to you, our hearts are so caught up with the things of this world.

Forgive us, we pray, Lord, for the times that we have loved too much the things of this world and not loved enough the things of the world to come. Lord, all our trust is in you, and we know, Lord, that the things of this world that are not right won't be put right fully until you come.

[31 : 14] And so we pray, come, Lord Jesus, make all things new and make us ready for that day. For we ask in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.