



The End is Nigh – isn't it? 1 Thess 5:13-18

BUFFERS

We've all been on a train that has come to the end of the line. However good or bad our journey has been, it all ends up at the buffers. And whether its a nice smooth stop or this CRASH, we know the end has come. Life has an end. It's the end of a journey. But what's that end like?

PRECIPICE

For many people the end of life is rather like this precipice. And when they reach it, what's at the end? Oblivion. Last week in the evening we looked at Ecclesiastes 3, the writings of a depressed, broken man who had known the blessings of God but who turned away from Him to do his own thing in his own way. For him, death was this: 3:19 Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. 20 All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

I know a lot of people who think like this. Before us this morning we see the antidote to this kind of thinking. Jesus, the one who died and Has risen. He's opened a way of life, forgiveness and hope. Rather than a precipice, we see a future stretching out before us.

FELIXSTOWE TRAIN AT IPSWICH

For those of us in Christ, death is but a station in our journey into eternity. Just as people change trains when the Felixstowe branch reaches the buffers at Ipswich, the end of our lives is also the beginning of another exciting journey with God. And part of that process is the knowledge that a Saviour came and an expectation that a King will come.

ADVENT

For Catholics and Anglicans, this Sunday marks the first Sunday in the church season of Advent. For as long as I can remember, the world remembers advent as a preparation for Christmas. We have advent calendars, put up our Christmas decorations, we have almost all our Christmas services in Advent as well as most of our Christmas parties and we just see it as the start of Christmas.

12 DAYS

If we were good Anglicans or Catholics, we wouldn't see it like that. Christmas is a twelve day feast starting at Midnight Mass on Christmas Day and ending on Epiphany on 6th January.

ADVENT

Advent in the Church Lectionary is the start of the Church year. The church year takes us from the Birth of Jesus, via, Easter and Pentecost, and the last Sunday before Advent is the Feast of Christ the King. And that's Jesus current state! He's risen, exalted. Advent is both a beginning and end as far as Jesus is concerned. It tells us that the eternal Son came to be a human being, and now that same risen and exalted Son will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Advent is a call to prepare for the coming King. It reminds us of the Son that

came, but He's come and gone as our Saviour and our exalted Lord. Our expectation of coming now is of a returning King. It's all about the hope of glory – that unfolding journey that I talked about earlier.

HEBREWS VERSE

In the early Church the promise that Jesus would come again as the conquering Messiah was taken seriously. There was an expectation that He would come and gather up His church then reign in glory. It was taught in the early Church as something that was imminent as the precise time had not been revealed to them. The problem was that they were expecting Jesus to come and were saddened that expectant people were dying around them and Jesus still hadn't come. They became sad and demoralised as there was a thinking that those who had died would not share in this glory.

JESUS IS COMING SOON

And in this passage in 1 Thessalonians Paul writes to the church to encourage them, that whether they are dead or alive, the Lord is coming and all His people would be gathered to be with Him eternally. Traditionally this picture has been called The Rapture of the Saints.

VERSE

So Paul writes to encourage them: *We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will take back with Jesus those who have died believing in him.*

VERSE

In fact, the dead, rather than being unfortunate, will be the first to go – they get priority – but those of us still alive will then be gathered too.

How can the dead be raised? The Creator God who made the world can do anything with what He has created, including bringing back to life anybody whose molecules have long been scattered into the fabric of the planet.

VERSE We know from Philippians that we are all going to be given new bodies, eternal bodies – and so we shall ever be with our Lord! *We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body, using that power by which he is able to bring all things under his rule.*

JESUS COMING SOON

For us, this is the message of Advent. Yes there was a baby and manger, but there was the man, the crucifixion, the death, the resurrection. This morning we have come for communion, to remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, to remember He is alive. He's with us by His Spirit. And one day He's going to come back to rule and reign – and it's that expectancy we have.

EXPLOSION

It's a point we've kind of lost view of the second Advent over the years. The problem for most evangelicals that it was overkilled in previous years. The Second Coming was a popular theme in the 20th century with two world wars. I was a child of the Cold War and I was reminded in a series currently running on the BBC that in the Cold War years there was almost a certainty that nuclear war would happen. I can remember people talking about it. Rich people built fallout shelters. There were gloomy films made about it. The Second Coming Doomsters were in

overdrive. Surely, now that the human race had the impending ability to destroy itself that, the Lord's return was imminent? There were numerous prophetic books, many of which I bought and read.

Now it's all receded again – fallen on to the back burner. I rarely hear it talked about. The same cycle happened a few times in the nineteenth century when there were numerous tomes on the second coming, relating to happenings in that century.

JESUS IS COMING SOON

That's unfortunate, because we still have a wonderful truth, a wonderful expectation and in Advent have a season of the year to remind ourselves it's going to happen – and we've turned it into a season when we look back to Christmas, rather than look forward to glory.

Jesus will return. We don't know when, but the clock is ticking down. We are given lots of prophecies in the Bible about the coming of the Messiah in glory. Actually there are over 300 references – the same as for His first advent. The problem is making sense of them. We are not given the precise time – just pointers to help us be prepared. So in the seventies and eighties I remember reading books and going to conferences to hear that the Bible pointed to our times as second coming times and gave detailed comparisons of prophecies to the Cold War protagonists. That's now gone. In my last church I had someone who was interested in Bible prophecy and he assured me the second coming wasn't imminent because things weren't lined up as in prophecy. A confusion of voices? Yes, and Jesus warned of this. Yet the promise is clear: Jesus is coming back!

TANKS

On the other hand, there is one piece of clearly fulfilled prophecy of end times that's incontrovertible and that's the restoration of Israel as a sovereign state.

PROTESTERS

And worse, it's a state with the ability to destroy other lands and be destroyed itself – that's only something that's come about in recent years. That's another aspect of Bible prophecy – a state of Israel under threat of complete destruction. Evangelicals may have brought end times prophetic thought into disrepute but it still doesn't get away from the fact that the prophecy is there, it involves a state of Israel and we have a God who keeps His promises. We've proved those promises in our lives, therefore if we read that Jesus is to return, we take it seriously.

ARE YOU READY?

Jesus will return. It could be any time. It could be soon. Are you ready? My testimony is just that. Someone said Jesus could return at any time. Was I ready? I decided I wasn't and trusted Jesus. So you can't put the decision off for another day or another year, or until you get near when you expect to die. He could come very soon. And where would that leave you?

And if you are a Christian. Are you ready? If He comes today, will you wish He hadn't when you look back at missed opportunities? What about all those we know who don't know Jesus. We hope that are going to have a lifetime's opportunity to follow Jesus. Maybe not.

THE END IS NIGH?

There's an urgency to this message. We can look at the pointers. We can say that we seem to be in an age when Jesus will return. So when will Jesus return. We don't know.

1 THESS 5:2

Here's a verse that should help us. *For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief comes at night.* 1 Thess 5:2

Have you ever been burgled? I bet it came as a surprise. But if you thought you might be burgled, what would you have done? Yes, been prepared.

THE END IS NIGH?

And that's the message of Advent. Jesus is coming, be prepared. We have no problem preparing for Christmas, but this season is about being prepared for Jesus. Not the baby, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It's a call to trust and follow Him. It's a call for each of God's people to live lives as though He could come any time soon.

Are you prepared?

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