

Morning Prayer, 24th May 2020, Revelation 21vs1-8

Reading:

A New Heaven and a New Earth

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”^[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **2** I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **4** ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

6 He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. **7** Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. **8** But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Teaching:

Since Christ's ascension, we are living in end times: the time between His 1st and 2nd coming. In the last 12 months we have seen on the news worldwide flooding, landslides, earthquakes, forest fires, showers of massive hail stones, the systematic destruction of rain forests, drought famine, plagues of locusts in E. Africa and of course Covid 19. Recently I read the sun is shining less brightly.

But I didn't read that in Nature or New Scientist so can probably discount it. But in view of all these events, some are asking are we coming to the end of end times – what the Bible calls the end of the age or the last of days.

Well Jesus left us the signs to look for in **Matthew 24 v11**:

Jesus warns that, at that time many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. The Watchtower Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) claim to be God's only prophet on earth today and sections of that Society are saying Covid 19 marks the beginning of the end of the world. Well the Society's record on prophecy isn't great! Look online. They prophesied the 2nd coming of Christ in 1874, the invisible coming of Christ in 1914, the rise and return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Old Testament prophets in 1925 the end of history in 1975.

Now I do believe there is a true prophetic voice in the Church today and we are told in **1 Thess.5v19** not to treat prophecies with contempt but to test everything and hold on to the good.

I do not have the gift of prophecy, but many would agree this world is in trouble because there is no fear of God today. Fear of the Lord is not terror of the Lord but respect for His authority, standing in awe of His majesty revering His word, His commandments, His righteousness and His love.

There are many references to the fear of the Lord in His word.

Here are some examples. **Ps147 v11** The Lord delights in those who fear Him who put their hope in his unfailing love.

Pro14 v8 The fear of the Lord is the fountain of life. Jesus in **Lk12 v5** Fear him, after killing of the body has the power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you fear Him. Covid 19 and the associated lock down appear

to me to be a God given time for the world as a whole to reflect, and either return to its same old ways, or return to Him in holy fear.

Are we in the last of days? I don't know. But surely the more important question is to ask ourselves if we are ready for them? In 1970 I certainly wasn't. I sped out of Glengormley on my wee Yamaha 125. I got held up by an ice cream van. (Mr Softee or Mr Whippy). In frustration, I bobbed and weaved and eventually got past it at the old entrance to the zoo. I turned in the saddle to give the driver a gesture that's not in the Highway Code and went straight into a really, large and deep pothole. I came off. The van was right behind me and how it missed me I will never know. I limped home with bent forks and a sprained ankle. The only lesson learnt was don't mess with Mr Softee.

But on reflection today, the stark and brutal reality is that if I had been killed, I would have gone to a lost eternity. As Smith Wigglesworth, the famous evangelist would say: "Jesus teaches it I believe it, that's an end to it." V8 reads "the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of sulphur.

Was I a bad kid? In my opinion no! On the credit side: I wasn't vile. I wasn't a murderer, but at the height of the troubles there were many I wished dead. I wasn't sexually immoral. I was just 19 but that would come later. I didn't practise magic arts. But on the debit side: I was an idolater. I worshipped Leeds Utd, Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd and alcohol. (Please note 50 years on that, I still follow Leeds Utd and I still like 70s prog rock, but now God comes 1st.) I certainly was a liar when it suited and was a coward. Although I professed faith in Christ in church at an early age. I never professed Him outside church when I was older and went to grammar school and beyond. That was a secret I kept to myself. Was I an unbeliever? Well I've always believed in a creator God. I believed all the facts about Jesus – His incarnation, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection. But those facts hadn't really penetrated my heart. I was religious OK, going through all the required rituals but not righteous. Because righteousness depends on relationship with Jesus; knowing Jesus and more importantly being known by Jesus.

Jesus warns in **Matt7 v22** "**Many will say to me on that day (the end of days) Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers.**"

At 19 I didn't have any good works to fall back on. If I had, would they have saved me? No! Even if I had climbed Mt. Everest in my gutties raising £1 trillion for charity I could not have stood before God in my own self-generated, self-righteousness.

Eph2 v8 It is by grace you have been saved, through faith and not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved to do good works. Works, that are done out of love for Jesus and that glorify Him only. This all seems very harsh. Unbelievers can't accept that a loving God could ever send anyone to a lost eternity. They're absolutely correct! This is something an unbeliever does to and for himself.

We simply cannot put a price on God's love for us all no matter how vile or unworthy we feel. But by the same token, we mustn't underestimate His purity, cleanness, holiness, His absolute sense of justice and righteousness. The Hebrew root of the word righteousness tells us it is not being perfectly right. It's about relationship. If 2 people make an agreement with each other to build a relationship, and hold to the terms of that agreement, then they are said to be righteous or straight in each other's eyes. God loves us unconditionally and wants to reside with us and us with Him. But because of God's absolute purity he can't live with fallen sinful man.

So, God in His love set out a new agreement (or covenant) to heal our broken relationship with Him. **Jn3 v16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.** We either accept the terms of this agreement and are righteous or straight in God's eyes and can live with God. Or we choose not to accept them and choose to live and die apart from God in our unrighteousness. What if a person is too young or doesn't have the mental capacity to understand the terms or has never heard of the terms? God is just loving and merciful. There will be no miscarriages of justice at the end of days.

After my accident I wasted 3 years living apart from God, pursuing earthly pleasures and ambitions. As a result, I endured a lot of pain, heartache and suffering. But I've since learned when you accept God's terms, commit your life to Jesus, repent, ask forgiveness for going your own way instead of his, and thank him for dying to take away your sins, ask him to come into your life and make you the person he wants you to be and build a relationship with him. Then you begin to really live, enjoy

life in all its fullness, and live life with a new found freedom – free from guilt, free from the fear of political instability, unemployment, Covid 19, lockdown, post lockdown free from the fear of death itself and free from the fear of end of days. Why? Because then you experience fully God's love and know God is truth, His word is truth, and His promises are truth.

1Jn 5 v11-13 “God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life, whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I am writing this to you so that you may know that you have eternal life – you that believe in the Son of God.

Christians **know** their glorious future is guaranteed no matter what their circumstances are in this life. Christians **know** how the story ends for them. “ There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.” Are you ready for the end of days? I pray on bended knee that you are. Amen.