

Word notes Sunday 19/02/2012 Tony Hodge
Christ's Return

Summary (read this bit out to remind cell members what was said on Sunday)

Key Text: Matt 24:30-51

Each year seems to bring it's own predictions of apocalypse, whether a natural disaster or some prophecy or divination of the end of the world. Last year it was Harold Camping and his biblical numerology, this year it's the turn of the Mayan Calendar prediction. Over the centuries there have been many such, all having one thing in common: they were all wrong! What are Christians to make of such claims and what should we do about them, after all we too expect there to be an end to the current state of the world when Jesus returns.

Jesus spoke to his disciples about this very matter; he wanted those who knew him well to be assured of his return in glory and to know how to interpret the signs of the times. Earlier in the chapter he has told them of some of the things that will happen before his return, his main point is that they not be deceived by false prophets or christ, neither should they be alarmed at hearing news of wars, famines and earthquakes – these are just the beginnings of birth pains. What does he want us to know and do:

- 1, Jesus is coming back. A simple promise of the Lord's return in glory and power.
- 2, It will be unmistakable. All will recognise Jesus as Lord (Phil 2:9-11)
- 3, It will be sudden even though expected.
- 4, Nobody knows when – not even Jesus.
- 5, We should be ready
- 6, But not complacent, even though the master will be away for a "long time" (v48) don't let things slip.
- 7, we should be doing his will – see the Great Commandment & Titus 2:11-14.

For the Christian, Jesus' return is something to anticipate with longing: an end to injustice, mourning and death, a new closeness with God as He dwells with His people. For the unbeliever there is bad news: judgement and eternal punishment. Even the false predictions of the end of the world cause distress and fear amongst some who believe these things will happen. We should be ready to share the Good News of Jesus at all times but maybe especially when there is so much talk about the end of the world – even if most is joking and not believed. NB though that Jesus' message was **not** "repent the end of the world is nigh" but "repent, the Kingdom of God is a hand" – a positive message of acceptance and love not wrath and destruction.

Application (this is the bit where cell members get to participate. Lead discussions around these points)

Read through the chapter and identify promises and warnings Jesus gives his disciples. Which ones still apply today?

Verses 44-51 contain a parable. What does it say to Christians? How does it fit with the parables of the ten virgins and the talents immediately following in giving instruction to Christians in the last days?

Why do you think Jesus talked of these things? Was it so they could be watching out for every little detail of prophesy of end-times and be prepared or so they would see the big picture and live accordingly? How does verse 33 fit with your answer – how will you deal with seeing or hearing of such things?

Witness (this is the bit where the cell talks and prays about how to share the Good News)

2012 isn't just the year of the alleged Mayan apocalypse it holds celebrations of the queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics. These are great opportunities to celebrate together, have parties and break down walls within communities but unless we plan ahead we'll miss it all. Start discussing now what is going on in your area and what you might do to reach out to neighbours.