

The last days – Bible in 9 weeks part 8. Rev. Bruce Stanley

Matthew 24:1-14(or 28), 36-44. www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

● III – Odd socks – hanging up on a line

These are from our laundry. Over the past 4 years, these socks have become unique. No partner. They're unhappy socks. And they're fairly useless. I don't know what happened to their partners. They're gone. Never to be seen again. We hold on to them hoping that someday there will be a reunion with the other socks that look the same. Sometimes it happens. But usually, the pile keeps growing.

That's like us as humans. God made us to be paired up with him in a relationship. And now, we're like odd socks in a difficult world. Today, we live in the last days of this world, and we are waiting for one thing: to be paired up in a relationship with God forever.

● Ephesians 1:10 says God's plan is:

¹⁰*to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

God's plan is to bring all things together under Christ. To take us "odd socks" and reunite us in a community, with Him, forever, through Jesus.

So the question we're asking today is:

When will it happen? When will the socks finally be paired up? When will we be able to live in that perfect community with God? And what does it mean for our life today?

● And first answer is – the last days are NOW

The last days have already started. And they started with Jesus' death and resurrection. Have a look with me at 2 Corinthians 15:20-23

- ²⁰*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*
- ...²³ *Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

That means that Jesus **begins** and **ends** the last days.

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Jesus' resurrection (the last days begin)	today (the last days continue)	our resurrection The very <u>last</u> day
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He begins the last days with **his** resurrection.

We live in the last days now.

Then Jesus will end the last days with his return and **our** resurrection.

So the next questions are:

- "WHEN is that '**last day**' going to happen?" and "WHAT do we do while we wait?"

So let's turn to our first reading for today:

● Let's READ Matthew 24:1-14

A lot of questions come out of a passage like this: What are the last days going to be like? What do the signs mean? When will Jesus return? How will that affect the way we live? What should we be doing while we wait? Let me highlight two things from this passage and talk about how they affect our life today.

● 1. Be spiritually prepared.

In verses 4-12, Jesus says that we are living in the last days NOW. Today. And these last days will be difficult times. There will be false prophets, wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution. Jesus doesn't

say this so we can **predict** the end of the world. He's saying that these last days will be **full** of these sorts of events in **every** generation – from when Jesus walked the earth right up until today. They won't stop until he returns. There will be natural disasters and manmade disasters all through these last days. And Jesus is telling us this to **warn** us of the opposition we will face each day **SO WE CAN BE READY FOR IT!**

He's urging us to be spiritually prepared in our life, so we will be able to persevere during the difficult times of these last days.

- **III** – This week I was watching a life insurance commercial and they said this:
"Most people would do anything to protect the physical security of their family... Financial security is at the top of the list."

That is true for most people, isn't it? Life insurance, life assurance, health insurance, financial security, superannuation, investments, funeral cover, car cover – we physically prepare ourselves by investing physically with insurance to protect the physical security of ourselves or our family.

But Jesus is saying that we need to invest **spiritually** to be able to endure the trials of these last days. How have you invested spiritually in your life? How do you prepare **spiritually** for wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, false teachers, weak faith and wicked people? As well as a global financial crises?

I think we go to extraordinary lengths to preserve our financial and physical well being with what the world offers. You might be prepared if you have a car accident for your medical bills to be paid and your car to get fixed. But what do you have in your life to prepare for a **spiritual** attack?

Jesus is saying that these last days will be difficult. We need to invest in spiritual things to guard against these attacks.

- Because, verse 13 – *"he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world."*

That brings us to our second point. Stand firm **so the gospel can be preached**. In other words, remember:

- **2. It's not all about YOU!**

Jesus is not just talking about looking after your own faith and spiritual welfare. He's talking about **each other**. How do we protect against false teachers in our churches unless **we** read God's word ourselves? How are we helping each other stand firm under persecution or difficult times in our lives? It's not just about keeping YOUR faith strong. It's about strengthening **each other**.

WE need YOU at church to be encouraged by YOU. WE need YOU to pray for US. WE need YOU to encourage us in how we live our lives. WE need YOUR example of serving. WE need YOUR time for ministry in church. We have real physical and spiritual needs as a church. Are we spiritually investing not only for the sake of our **own** salvation, but for the sake of each other?

We can often be quick to cut down our ministry work to cope with our **paid** work load, but are we prepared to cut down our **paid** work hours to do more ministry work?

You see, it's not just about you. It's about those around you. Spiritual investing in for the sake of others. Because it's not just about you.

[[[Parents – a special note for you. If you spend 40 hours a week at work, and 5 **minutes** a week with your child praying, what does that tell your child about the priorities of your life? When you encourage them to do their homework for 3 hours a week, but spend 2 minutes a night reading a Bible story to them, what does it tell them about the way you invest your time?]]]]

When we “fit in” church ministry and services around our career and sports and parties and family commitments, what are we teaching our children, or our parents, or our friends, about our life priorities?

So are we making too big a deal out of this? Do we really need to make changes in our priorities?

- Look back at the START of verse 12: *“the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached.”*

Finally, let’s listen to the second reading...

- **Matthew 24:36-44**

I remember some ad campaign for national security a while ago – the slogan was something like: “Be alert, but not alarmed.” And I want to suggest that Jesus is saying we should:

- **Be alert AND alarmed**. We need to be alert and waiting for the return of Jesus and we need to be alarmed when we understand the limited time we have to share the gospel.

No-one knows the day or the hour. You know, even in Bible believing churches, I’ll hear people say things like: “We don’t know when he’ll return, but it won’t be in the next few months!” Or even “Jesus will return but people will have an opportunity to turn to him then.”

Friends, be alert and alarmed when you hear these things. Because Jesus will return **once** more and it will be to judge. To divide the sheep and goats. To lead the faithful to heaven and send the unfaithful to hell. There will be no further warning and no second chances. 1 Thessalonians 4 says

- ¹⁶*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

Then in 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul continues:

- ⁸*He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰**on the day he comes** to be glorified in his holy people”*

The last days will end with **one day** – the day of Jesus’ return. He will raise believers to everlasting life on that day, and unbelievers will rise to everlasting destruction. And there will be no second chances. That day will come only with this warning ahead of time:

- *“the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”* (Matt 24:44)

For God’s sake, for His gospel, and for your sake, and for the sake of others, get your life in order today. Invest spiritually today. For yourself. For your family. For your church. For this suburb, this mission field. **Hear** these warnings and **guard** your spiritual life. This may be the last warning you hear to get your life in order. And it’s not just about you. It’s about the people around you. It’s about those who will come to faith because of your life and your commitment to the ministry of God’s work in his church.

Be **alert** and **alarmed** because the day is near. Invest spiritually, for your own sake, and for the sake of others.