

Departing Words of the Returning King

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 February 2018

Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[0 : 00] As we take our seats, it would be helpful if you have that passage open in front of you. We're going to be referring to it as we go through this morning's sermon. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Alistair.

I have the privilege of being on staff here at the church, and I have the joy of speaking on this passage. But before we look at it, let's just take a moment to still our hearts and pray to the God of this universe.

Lord, we thank you that you are with us. We thank you that your rod and staff comfort us and that you have promised to never leave us.

Help us remember these truths as we think about your word this morning and help us learn and be challenged from it. In Jesus' name we ask all these things. Amen.

On December 29th, 1913, so it's quite a little bit away, there was an ad in the London Times newspaper by Ernest Shackleton.

[1 : 02] He was a polar explorer, and during his life he led three expeditions to the Antarctic. The ad in the Times read like this. Now when I first read this ad, my thought was, Ernest, what are you playing at?

Why would you get an ad like that? You're not going to get anyone on your side. This is the worst recruitment strategy in the world. If you were going to write an ad like that, maybe you'd start with something along the lines of Antarctic cruise, get paid to be on holiday, skiing in untouched snow, unseen wildlife, majestic views.

See, we'd love to sugarcoat it, wouldn't we? But the truth is that Ernest was giving an honest picture of what it would be like to go on an Antarctic expedition.

He put all of his cards on the table, told the people the way it was going to be, and let them decide whether they wanted to join him or not. He didn't promise them a bed of roses, but told them exactly what to expect.

And the truth is that it wasn't going to be pretty. Now in the passage that was read out to us earlier on, Jesus gives his disciples a similar kind of description, doesn't he?

[2 : 41] Jesus is telling his disciples what life is going to look like when he is taken away from them. Now at this point in Luke's Gospel, we are in Jerusalem with Jesus.

Jesus arrived in chapter 19, and he's been teaching in the temple every day. But now Jesus turns and focuses on his disciples, because the cross is just on the horizon.

In just a few days, their Lord and Savior will be crucified, but he will be raised from the dead. And when he is in heaven with the Father, there will be a time of waiting until his return.

There will be a time where King Jesus is physically absent, and so in our passage this morning, we see the departing words of the returning King.

The departing words of the returning King. Jesus is preparing his disciples for what life is going to be like as they wait for his second coming. And he gives them three imperatives, three actions that they are to do as they live in anticipation of his return.

[3 : 47] Watch out, stand firm, and look up. So let's look at these departing words of the returning King together.

The first thing we see in verses 5 to 8, Jesus says to his disciples, Watch out, watch out. If you have an NIV this morning, or one of the Pew Bibles, look down with me at verse 8, and you'll see that Jesus says, Watch out that you are not deceived.

What is it that the disciples are to watch out for? And why? Well, in verse 5, they are standing admiring the temple. They see the massive stones, the beautiful furnishings, the vast grounds which all point to the spectacular architectural achievement that the temple is.

The temple is beautiful. It is big. It is a monument to remind people of the strength, power, and beauty of the God who is worshipped there. And quite rightfully, the disciples stand there and they're taken aback.

And they're discussing how beautiful it is together. And then Jesus drops a bomb on their conversation. One day, Jesus says, this monument which is dedicated to God, this magnificent place of worship, will be gone.

[5 : 10] It will be destroyed. Not one stone will be left in its place. The outward beauty of the temple is no indication of the spiritual state of those who are in it.

If you remember back to chapter 19, you'll remember that the spiritual state of those in the temple was not great. The temple was beautiful on the outside, but the hearts of those who were in it were far from beautiful.

God's judgment is going to come on the people of Israel because of their disobedience. And the temple will be destroyed. Devastating news for any Jew.

The temple was their place of worship. It was the place where they went to show their dedication and devotion to God. The place where they met with God and worshipped Him.

And one day, it's all going to be gone. Can you imagine some of the questions running through the disciples' minds as they hear this? But Jesus, haven't you come to kick out the Romans?

[6 : 14] To sit on your earthly throne here and rule over Jerusalem as God's king? How can you say that the temple will be destroyed? Where will we worship God?

Tons of questions running through their minds. But the question they ask is not to do with exactly how all this will happen, but they say, Jesus, when?

When will this happen and what are the signs of its coming? You see that in verse 7. When will these things happen?

And Jesus answers their question and tells them the first sign of the coming kingdom of God. The first sign that the kingdom of God is coming is that false teachers will rise up and claim that they are Jesus.

They will claim that they are sent by God and Jesus says in verse 8, watch out. Do not be deceived. Do not follow them. Now we might sit here today and think, well, obviously.

[7 : 17] If someone stands on the corner of the street and shouts that they are God's king and that God's kingdom is coming, we're not going to believe them, are we? But put yourself in the shoes of the disciples.

In just a few days, their teacher, their Lord, their friend, is going to be crucified. Once he is resurrected and with the Father, they will be looking for Jesus' return.

They will be eagerly expecting him to come back. And so Jesus warns them, says, watch out. People will come and they will try to divert your attention from the kingdom of God.

They will try to pull you away from me. Watch out, Jesus says. One of the signs of the coming kingdom of God is that false messiahs will appear and try to distract you from God.

Do not be deceived, Jesus says. Do not follow them. Are we watching out? And we sit here this morning around 2,000 years away from the events described here.

[8 : 23] But the warning to watch out is just as true today as it was back then. King Jesus has not yet returned. We are still waiting for God's kingdom to come in its fullness.

And so like the disciples, we have to watch out. We need to pay attention to the things that we read, to the things that we listen to, to the things that we allow access to influence our hearts and minds. Now the internet is a wonderful thing. I love the internet. I really do. Not just for the cat videos, but for everything else. It gives you access to some wonderful resources, great sermons, great books, great articles, great podcasts, you name it.

But it also has things that aren't helpful, things that can be quite dangerous. Just like the temple, on the surface, it all looks fine.

But if you dig around a little bit, you'll find that it is not fine at all. It is just as deceitful as the hearts that are currently worshipping in the temple. We need to watch out and not be deceived.

[9 : 31] Do not listen to those who speak of themselves as more than mere people. Do not listen to those who proclaim that they have a greater knowledge of God's kingdom or of God's timing.

Be careful and watch out for those who proclaim Jesus plus something equals salvation. Because the truth is that Jesus plus anything equals wrong.

Jesus is everything. Jesus is all. And we need to watch out. Jesus says, do not be deceived and do not follow them.

The King will come back and if we trust in Him, if we are at peace with Him, we will be in His arms and His comfort will be with us.

We need to watch out. And the second thing that this departing King says is that His disciples need to stand firm. In verses 9 to 24, stand firm.

[10:38] The disciples need to stand firm in light of different signs of the coming kingdom of God. These signs are wars and disasters, the destruction of Jerusalem and persecution.

And in light of all of these signs, Jesus says in verse 19, stand firm. In verses 9 to 11, you see Jesus saying that they are to stand firm in light of wars and disasters that will come upon the earth. Jesus is explaining some of the terrifying events that will happen. But He doesn't say this so that they can speculate as to when the kingdom of God is coming. He says this to encourage them because all of these events, as terrible and terrifying as they are, they are pointing to the great event of the King's return.

These are the signs which will affect the whole world. But in verse 9, Jesus encourages His disciples and says, do not be frightened.

Can you see the tenderness of Jesus? Even though He is predicting times of difficulty, He looks at His disciples and says, don't be scared.

[11:57] This is the Son of God who is speaking. This is the one through whom the whole world was created. He knows what's going to happen. He knows the end result. These wars, yes, they will be painful.

Yes, they will destroy people and places. But Jesus knows they will not last forever because the King will come victorious and there will be no more crying, no more pain and God will dwell with His people.

And until then, there will be wars and disasters. But do not be frightened because these wars will not hinder the kingdom of God. and nor will the kingdom of God delay.

God is working according to His perfect timing, according to His perfect plan which no war can foil, which no person can mess up.

God's plan will be accomplished. And then in verses 20 to 24, Jesus is speaking about the signs that will befall Jerusalem.

[13:01] Now we've seen this before, haven't we? Again, in chapter 19, Jesus has warned Jerusalem of their coming judgment for how they've rejected God. In verse 22, if you look down, you'll see it says, for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.

God has been warning the people of Israel for hundreds and hundreds of years that they need to repent and turn to Him. God has been patiently waiting and calling them back to Himself, but they have not listened.

They have continued in their lives of rebellion, but now, Jesus says, the time of fulfillment has come. Judgment is coming. Now if we look back in history, we can see that this judgment came in 70 AD as the Romans march in and destroy Jerusalem.

Jesus is warning His disciples of what is going to happen. He is telling them that they need to stand firm. Jerusalem, you need to stop putting your confidence in this temple.

Stop putting your confidence in a building. Instead, focus on the King Jesus. The glory of a temple is nothing compared to the King who will return one day.

[14:23] and all people will see His power and His majestic glory. Sandwiched in between the wars and the destruction of Jerusalem is the third sign which points to the return of the King.

Verses 12 to 19, Jesus explains that the disciples will be persecuted. And in light of all of this, in verse 19, Jesus says, stand firm.

Jesus is laying out the difficult truths about the cost of being a Christian. They will be persecuted, betrayed, taken to court and some of them will be killed.

Why is all of this happening? Why? Verses 12 and 17, Jesus says twice that all of this is happening because of His name.

Jesus tells His disciples that they will be taken to court. They will be imprisoned. They will be betrayed by family members and friends, even put to death. Why?

[15:31] Verse 17, because this world hates me, Jesus says. Whilst these horrendous acts affect the disciples, the truth is that they are actually an attack on Jesus Himself.

Imagine the fear of the disciples when they hear these things. It's not like the departing king is giving them a nice to-do list. Make sure the grass is cut when I'm gone. Make sure the grounds are kept neat and tidy.

Make sure the people of my house are kept happy, healthy and well fed. No. Jesus is saying, in my absence you will be mistreated. You will be hated and looked down on all because of me.

You can imagine the disciples asking in their minds, can't you, Jesus, what is the point? Why are you going to let all this happen? In verse 13, Jesus says, all of this will happen but you will be bearing witness of me.

The way you conduct yourselves, the stands that you take for me, the way you act in front of your persecutors, all of it will bear witness to my name. The way you live and show what the gospel really is.

[16:46] All of this is an opportunity for you to tell people about me, Jesus says. All of this is not meaningless but it is pointing to me, the future king who will return.

Now, I know that for some of us this morning this is a very live situation. Maybe you've come from a week at work in the office or at home and you've been struggling on account of your faith in Jesus. You've had to take a stand for something because of what you believe. Listen to Jesus as he encourages you through his word that none of it is in vain.

In all the difficulties of living life as a Christian in a world that hates Jesus, we are bearing witness to him. In all of this stand firm, Jesus says.

In verse 14 we see the fourth and final do not statement. Follow along with me. In verse 8 you see do not be deceived, do not follow them.

[17:53] In verse 9 do not be frightened of the wars and disasters and in verse 14 Jesus says do not worry. How can Jesus say this in light of all of these things?

Well, verse 15 the amazing promise that is there. Jesus says you don't have to worry because I will be with you. Jesus isn't going to leave his disciples empty handed.

He isn't going away and leaving them to their own devices. No, Jesus says I will be with you. That is why you do not have to worry. Do not worry about what you are going to say because I will give you the words to say when the time is right.

I will give you the wisdom that you need so that your enemies, so that my enemies will not be able to contradict or resist you. In all of this, Jesus says, stand firm and not a hair on your head will perish, Jesus says in verse 18.

Now this doesn't mean that the disciples won't die. Jesus has just told them in verse 16 that they will, but it means that Jesus is offering them a greater protection, a more important protection, the protection of their souls.

[19:18] The worst thing that your persecutors can do, Jesus says, is they can kill your body. That's it. They cannot harm your soul. Your soul is protected by God.

Stand firm and you will win life. As you stand firm, Jesus says, you are bearing witness to me, living in a world which hates me.

Remember all the time that your soul is hiding in the protection of the king. Richard Wurmbrand is a practical example of what it looks like to stand in light, to stand firm in persecution.

For those of you who've never heard of him, he was a Romanian pastor who spoke out against the communist government as they tried to control the church in Romania. He was imprisoned and tortured for 14 years because of his outspokenness and his illegal work with the underground churches in Romania.

and he has to say this about standing firm in Jesus in his book *Tortured for Christ*. I tremble because of the sufferings of those persecuted in different lands.

[20:34] In the depth of my heart, I would like to keep the beauty of my own vineyard, to not be involved in such a huge fight. I would like so much to be somewhere in quietness and rest, but it is not possible.

the quietness and rest for which I long would be an escape from reality and dangerous for my soul. Richard is saying that yes, we can shy away from standing up for Jesus, but that is dangerous and it is detached from reality.

Instead, Jesus is calling us to a life of sacrifice as we face a world which hates him and as a result of that hatred will persecute us. Jesus says, stand firm to his disciples.

Are we standing firm this morning? As we live in a world which hates Jesus, which persecutes and judges Christians because of their faith, are we taking a stand?

Are we representing Jesus? This is the cost of being a Christian. You will be hated. We will be rejected and despised.

[21 : 45] We will be judged and persecuted, but not because of ourselves, but because of who we serve. What might it look like for us to stand firm?

For some of us it might be a very public thing because we're naturally in the public eye. For others it might mean not joining in with something or not encouraging something within our families.

In any case, for each and every one of us this definitely means that in all situations, in all circumstances, we are to bear witness to Jesus.

And we are to take every opportunity to explain why we are different. Our obligation is to God, not to this world. Our duty is to serve the King, the one who protects our souls, not to serve people who can only destroy our bodies.

Take courage in the promise of verse 15. Jesus is with you. The King of this universe is on your side. The hands which created and sustained the whole world, the God whose power spoke this very world into being, is with you.

[23 : 02] In all of the persecution that we suffer now, or that we will suffer in the future as a result of our faith in Jesus, stand firm. So we are to watch out.

We are to stand firm. And then Jesus tells his disciples in verses 25 to 38 that they are to look up. 25 to 38, look up.

So Jesus is telling his disciples about all of these signs that will come, but not so that they can speculate as to the timing of the King's return.

Instead, he's telling them all of these things so that they can remember, even though he is gone, he's coming back. All of these signs are pointers to the King's return, but the question remains, how will Jesus return?

Well, look at the marvelous description that we see in verse 27. Jesus will return coming in a cloud with power and with great glory.

[24 : 07] Jesus' return will not be a secret event hidden from the world, but all will see him as he comes. And on that day, all people will acknowledge his power and his glory.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem in chapter 19, we looked at this a few weeks ago, he entered the city on the back of a donkey. But when he returns, there will be no mistake about who Jesus is, because his power and his glory will be on display.

The rightful King will return with true authority, with glory and sovereign power. All nations and peoples from every language will gather and worship him.

His dominion is everlasting and his kingdom will never, ever be destroyed. This is God's King and this is how he will return.

But notice the two responses to Jesus' return in verses 26 and 28. In verse 26, you see some people who will be terrified as they see the King returning.

[25 : 23] And then in verse 28, you see some people who will welcome the King. They will stand up, lift up their heads and rejoice because their redemption is drawing near. These are the two responses to Jesus.

If people reject Jesus, if they don't believe in him and have faith in him, then when he returns they will be afraid of the coming judgment. God will be and have faith in Jesus.

They will rejoice because he is returning to reign over his people and we will be completely reconciled with God. That is the great news of our returning King.

They will rejoice because their redemption, their salvation will be complete. God will dwell with them and we will dwell with God. these are the two reactions to the King.

How will you react this morning? Will you rejoice because your King is coming or will you tremble because judgment is coming?

[26 : 34] Your response is not insignificant but it has eternal implications. Your response to Jesus affects your eternal state before God so please let me ask you how will you react at Jesus' return.

In verses 29 to 31 Jesus tells them a story so that people can understand everything he has been saying in this chapter. He says just as the leaves of a tree indicate that summer is coming, that summer is just around the corner, all of these events in verses 8 to 28 are signs of the return of the King.

And in verses 32 and 33 Jesus says these signs will take place almost imminently but the return of Jesus will come one day. There will be a time of waiting.

These signs will start as soon as Jesus departs and they will continue until he returns. That's what Jesus means when he says that surely this generation will not pass away until these things happen. Jesus says this world will pass away. It will be destroyed but the words of God, the words of God's Son will not pass away nor will they lose their power or their meaning but they will last forever.

[28 : 01] God's word is everlasting. The promises that Jesus is making in this passage from this morning, they will not pass away. the promises that he will be with his disciples, the promise that he will protect his disciples, they are everlasting and just as true today as they were then.

And in light of all of this, in verses 34 and 35, Jesus reminds his disciples to look up and have their focus on him. In light of all of these events and signs of the coming kingdom of God, they need to be careful.

They need to pay attention. Watch and pray, Jesus says, because the king's return will come suddenly. And these signs are already happening.

Watch and pray that you will be found in faith and able to stand at the coming of the king. Jesus is saying, don't get caught up in the things of this world but have your gaze fixed on me.

They are to remain faithful until he returns. And each day, people gather to hear Jesus speak in the temple. People come day after day to listen to Jesus but the question is, does it seep into their hearts?

[29 : 27] Or are they listening but not understanding? Are we looking up? Are we eagerly expecting the return of our glorious king?

Which reaction will we have when King Jesus returns? Will you have the first reaction of people in verse 26 who listen to Jesus every day in the temple but who never came to believe in him?

Or will you be like those in verse 28 who are waiting and who are rejoicing when the king returns?

This is an important question. Without Jesus, there is no hope for today and there is no hope for the future.

Your response to Jesus is the most important thing in the world. If you've never thought about it in these terms, please this morning, think about it. Consider Jesus, the king.

Do not leave without thinking about your state before God this morning. How will you respond? Turn to Jesus, find true hope and lasting confidence which can only be found in him.

[30 : 45] As Christians, we have a certain hope and a certain future with Jesus. As the well-known evangelist Billy Graham says when he expresses his hope in Jesus, he says this, Someday you will hear or read that Billy Graham is dead.

Don't you believe a word of it? I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.

This is the confidence that Christians have in the returning king. Do you share that same confidence that your soul is at rest with God?

If you can say that with Billy Graham, are you shaping your life around the king's return? Is your life built on anticipation that Jesus is coming back?

Are we living the life that Jesus is asking us to and calling us to in this passage? As we draw to a close this morning, let me encourage us all to heed the departing words of the returning king.

[32 : 00] Let us watch out for the things that would seek to distract us from God. Let us keep our gaze fixed on him. Let us stand firm in the knowledge that all the attacks that we face are not on us, but they are on Jesus.

They are because of who we serve. And let us see them as an opportunity to bear witness to him, the king who promises to be with us. And let us look up.

Let us keep our eyes fixed on our returning king. And let us have confidence that we will be with him forever. Let us pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have not left us to our own devices, but that you have promised to be with us in all of the difficulties of our lives. We ask, Lord, that you'd be with us this week as we put into practice what your word has been challenging us on.

Help us watch out. Help us stand firm. And help us look up. In all of this, remembering that we are living for your glory as we eagerly await the day of your triumphal entry.

[33 : 19] We pray all of this in the holy, powerful, and precious name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.