

November 28, 2010
Advent 1

“Just Like the Days of Noah before the Cataclysmic Flood”

MATTHEW 24:37-44

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

There is evidence throughout our world of huge cataclysmic events that occurred in the past. Some of the evidence points to a great world flood that once swept over our earth. When I served as a pastor in Santa Barbara, the congregation tried to drill a well on the church property. The drilling rig went down 400 feet but could not find a good source of water. But the well drillers did hit a layer of clam shells about 350 feet beneath where they were drilling. There are places above Santa Barbara where you can see layers of rock that are embedded with clam shells. New theories about the origin of the Grand Canyon suggest it may have been carved by a cataclysmic release of water from a large lake that once covered the region. Perhaps you have seen fossils embedded in the rock at places where highways were cut through the hills.

The Bible records for us the great world flood that took place at the time of Noah. The tops of the mountains were covered from waters that came from the fountains of the deep and from rain that fell forty days and forty nights. Jesus refers to this great world flood when he says, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at coming of the Son of Man.” Peter refers to it in his letter when he compares the destruction of the first world by water to an even greater destruction that will take place on the last days when Jesus returns. “By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

There is a huge difference between destruction by water and destruction by fire. Both have this in common. People living at that time and people living today become indifferent to all the warnings about the end coming soon. As Jesus said, it is just like the days of Noah when people ignored Noah’s call for repentance. He encourages us to keep watching because we do not know what day the he will come again on clouds of glory.

People will be swept away

Just as people were swept away by the great flood, Jesus tells us that they will be swept away on the last day into everlasting death and punishment. "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away." They knew nothing because they ignored the words that Noah had proclaimed to them for 120 years. They went about their affairs of life as if nothing would ever happen to them. People married and raised families, they ate and they drank, and suddenly they were swept away.

So it is with the times in which we are living. People get up in the morning to work, they make their coffee, they eat their breakfast, they check the morning news, but without any concern or thought that this could be their last day of life on this earth. Mind you, there is nothing wrong with these daily activities that take up all of our lives unless they keep us from thinking about Jesus' return for judgment. Jesus cares about people, all people. That is why he wants everyone to think about his return and the destruction that will take place on the last day. Why has Jesus waited so long to return? Peter tells us, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Jesus tells us the flood waters came "and took them all away." Recall in your mind some of the scenes of people trying to flee the waves of the Tsunami that struck several years ago. They tried to run, they tried to climb trees, they tried to swim, but they were swept away. What was the death toll? Was it not over 300,000 people? Genesis tells us that the great world flood covered the tops of the highest mountains. People were swept away when the fountains of the deep opened up. Over and over again it says in chapter seven, "And all flesh died." Everyone perished except Noah and his family who were kept safe in the ark. The only place to be safe when the last day comes is in the arms of Jesus, your Shepherd who gave his life for you and rose from the dead to rescue you from your sins. No other religion in the world can provide you with the protection that only Jesus can give.

It all happened so fast. It caught people in the middle of what they were doing. "This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left." There are some who use this verse of Scripture to say that when Jesus comes he will secretly take some people with him and leave others behind to suffer greatly on this earth during a great tribulation. Perhaps you have heard of the books and the films with name "Left Behind." Here is where this incorrect teaching originates. When Jesus comes he will not come secretly. He will come visibly on clouds of glory with the shout of an archangel and the blast of a trumpet. When he comes he will take those who believe in him to the joys of the place he has prepared for us, including those who are in their graves. He will sweep away the others away to everlasting punishment reserved for the devil and his angels.

Two are standing by the copy machine at work. One will be taken and the other left. Two are walking to school on Monday morning. One will be taken and the other left. Two are traveling down the road together. One will be taken and another left. Two are sleeping in bed together. One will be taken and the other left. Jesus wants everyone to put their hope in him now so that they are not caught by the last day, or even their hour of death,

when it comes.

Jesus wants us to keep on watching

Jesus wants us to keep watching and not lose hope. What does a parent say to a two year old child that is running around the room recklessly? "Be careful." What does a father say to his teenage daughter or son when he hands the car keys over for the first time? "Be careful!" What does wife say to her aging husband as he climbs the ladder to wash the windows in the house? "Be careful." What does Jesus tell us about the times in which we are living that are similar to the times of Noah? He says, "Be careful." "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

We need to be careful and watch because we cannot predict the day or the hour when Jesus will come again in glory. In the past history of the church strange cults and sects have emerged where people claim to have some special knowledge of when Jesus will return. Jesus said even the angels do not know when this will happen. He does give us signs in nature such as earthquakes, and signs in society such as wars and rumors of wars, and signs in the church of outbursts of false teaching. All these warnings and signs are intended to keep us from being so caught up with our every day concerns that we fail to think about Jesus return. Oh, if only we could live each day as if Jesus rose again yesterday, is with us today and coming again tomorrow.

Jesus uses the illustration of the thief to encourage us to be prepared at all times. "But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." We take precautions to protect ourselves against thieves. We lock our doors and windows. We may even install alarm systems. The thief does not come to your house when you are home. He comes when you are away. In Tucson our house was broken into in the middle of the afternoon. We came back and saw the back door open and the place where they had pried open the casement window. 1 Thessalonians 5 says, "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." Then it goes on to say, "But you brothers are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are sons of the light and sons of the day." Then this chapter encourages us to be alert and self-controlled.

Permit a little story to illustrate the need to be prepared. There was once a man in the southeast who like to supplement his food supply by illegally poaching game. The game warden decided to stake out his shack in the hills with the hope of catching him in the act. One day the warden got up before dawn and hid in the trees behind the poacher's shack. He watched and waited. Shortly after the sun began to rise he saw smoke coming from the chimney of the shack. Before long he could smell the coffee brewing and the tantalizing aroma of sizzling bacon wafting over his hiding place. Then he heard the poacher calling out across the woods. "O.K. Mr. Game Warden, you can come in for breakfast." Embarrassed and defeated, the Game Warden went into the shack and had breakfast. As they talked the warden asked the man how he knew he was hiding in the woods. "I didn't," said the poacher, "I call for you every morning to join me for breakfast just in case you are there." Talk about being prepared.

We wake up every morning hoping and praying that Jesus will come and catch us where we are at, catch us in his loving arms and take us home. Every morning we can open the curtains, look outside and wonder to ourselves, "This may be the day that my Jesus is coming in glory to take me home." The last day will begin like any other ordinary day. The roosters will crow, the alarm will go off, the coffee will brew, and the kids will get ready for school. Then it will happen. The heavens will open and Jesus will come on clouds of glory. It may be that you don't feel very prepared to meet Jesus if he were to come today before you can touch the remote and turn on the television for afternoon football. You think of the sinful and shameful things that have come into your mind, and even some things that you have said to other people that cause you to wince inside. If I had to face the last day robed in my own righteousness, then I am hopelessly lost. But I have Jesus. You have Jesus. Washed clean by his blood and covered by his righteousness, I can joyfully anticipate his return. Even so Lord, Jesus come quickly. Amen.