

## Sunday Readings | Michaelmas | Advent | Christmas 2023

### A NEW WAY OF SEEING

Now that I'm of a certain age I wear glasses all day every day, only taking them off to sleep. Without them on life is vague, unclear, and frustrating. I spend most of my time guessing. But when wearing them everything is just fine. Things make sense. I can see things as they really are. They have changed my life.

I am so grateful for the sabbatical that I have been able to take and for the extended times for retreat, reading, reflection and study which totally engaged and animated me. I am so grateful for this time which has stretched and expanded me, while refreshing my spiritual life and renewing my relationship with God so much. It's as if I was given a completely new set of glasses, not only bringing everything into focus, but also making everything come alive again.

Now that I have the glasses, I never want to take them off! And I am super keen to share them with you!

### Seeing the story afresh

The glasses of my sabbatical, that have brought so much into focus faith wise, has been learning how to read the New Testament from a **Jewish, first century perspective**. I can now see clearly how the everyday Jewish expectations of the 'Kingdom of God', the 'Day of the Lord', the 'resurrection of the dead', and the 'coming of the Messiah', are confirmed and completed not only in the life of Jesus, his teaching, healing, miracles and prophetic parables and actions, but also his sacrificial death, his resurrection, his ascension and his awaited return.

This will become very clear in the readings and passages we have this term.

It is now relatively uncontested among scholars that Jews in Jesus' day had certain expectations and hopes for how the **God of Israel** would work in their lives and in their nation, restoring it and fulfilling the prophetic oracles of old.

It is also uncontested that these expectations were normative for Jesus, the apostles, and the early apostolic church. These are called 'apocalyptic' expectations because of the 'apocalyptic' literature we find them most in – Jewish apocalyptic literature of the time – literature that revealed what time it was and what God was up to.

Reading these, it is possible to see that for 'Second Temple Jews' there were some key themes:

- They understood time divided into **two ages** - the present age and the age to come
- They longed for 'the day' when YHWH would send his anointed Messiah to execute both God's judgement of the wicked and his justification of the righteous.

- This 'day of Christ' (or the 'day of the Messiah' as 'Christ' is just a Greek word for Messiah) was synonymous with the arrival of God's kingdom.

The Jewish story and expectation of salvation was not complicated, and it was very down to earth. They simply were waiting for God to act - for him to send his anointed Messiah who would carry out God's mission to restore Israel, to re-establish the temple, to heal the land, to raise the dead, to bring God's kingdom on earth as it was in heaven, and to enable God's glory to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Jewish apocalyptic writing gave the sense that God was about to act, that he going to accomplish his plans really soon, and they encouraged the reader to get themselves ready.

Reading the scripture again with these simple ideas in mind has been totally refreshing for me, confirming, and yet clarifying the mission of God, the calling of Israel, and the passion, ethics, witness, and endurance of the early church, a community that was made up of both Jews and Gentiles and struggling to work out what this meant both theologically and practically. It's as if I am reading everything afresh and the stories, encouragements, and warnings are popping off the page with a fresh life and energy. Notoriously knotty theological concepts such as atonement, justification, salvific faith, eternal life, the kingdom of God, and the gospel, are finding a simple coherence and unifying consistency.

Many of us will know that once you see something it is impossible not to see it. In fact, we often see it cropping up everywhere. I remember a while ago, when I was doing up my campervan, just how many more campervans I saw on the road at the time. And once I saw one, I saw them everywhere.

It has been the same with my new glasses. Now that I have seen this 'apocalyptic' gospel I can't stop seeing it everywhere in the New Testament. So much so, that I thought I'd start underlining every passage where these themes emerged with a new pink pen so that it would stand out.

My bible now has pink on almost every page.

### **The term ahead**

With my new glasses on I have been wondering how best I could share them with everyone else, or how I could reproduce the glasses and give them away to as many as possible. As a communicator and a teacher, I was thinking through the possibility of running sessions, or holding bible studies, or producing short videos, and the like.

And then, as I was reading the lectionary passages that are set for this year and I realised that all I needed to do was to **highlight the pink in every passage** – and let the bible do the work each Sunday.

So that's what we are going to do. We are simply going to enjoy re-reading the same passages we have read many times before, but I will do my best to share my glasses with you all – so that you can see what I can see.

I am so looking forward to this term's teaching and learning together as a community where we will be following the Lectionary Readings for the season leading us up to Advent and Christmas. It's going to be so exciting for me to share these things with you.

The word 'apocalypse' comes from the Greek work for 'reveal' or 'revelation'. Over my sabbatical I guess I have been able to see things afresh, see them more clearly, and better make sense of it all. I am excited about sharing it all with you and us learning and seeing things together. As you will see in the readings below, I have simply highlighted the parts of the reading that contain apocalyptic expectation and hope. In my bible they are underlined in pink, so that I don't miss them.

I pray that God will help us pick up the urgency of the New Testament writers, of Jesus and of Paul, and to use these words to begin to reshape and re-energise our lives here in Reigate, for his glory, and so that all might be saved and receive eternal life when he comes.

Marantha. Come Lord Jesus.

Richard

## Romans 12:9-21

<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.<sup>[a]</sup> Do not be conceited.

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> **Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord.** <sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

'If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

## Matthew 18:10-14

<sup>10</sup> 'See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. <sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 'What do you think? **If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?** <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. <sup>14</sup> **In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.**

### **Romans 13:8-14**

<sup>8</sup> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,'<sup>[a]</sup> and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

**<sup>11</sup> And do this, understanding the present time: the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. <sup>13</sup> Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.**

### **Matthew 18:15-20**

<sup>15</sup> 'If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. <sup>16</sup> But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." <sup>17</sup> If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup> 'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

<sup>19</sup> 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'

## Romans 14:1-12

**14** Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. <sup>2</sup> One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

<sup>5</sup> One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. <sup>6</sup> Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. <sup>8</sup> **If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.** <sup>9</sup> **For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.**

<sup>10</sup> **You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.** <sup>11</sup> **It is written:**

**"As surely as I live," says the Lord,  
"Every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God."**

<sup>12</sup> **So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.**

## Matthew 18:21-35

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>23</sup> 'Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold<sup>[b]</sup> was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

<sup>26</sup> 'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

<sup>28</sup> 'But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.<sup>[c]</sup> He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

<sup>29</sup> 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back."

<sup>30</sup> **But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.** <sup>31</sup> **When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.**

<sup>32</sup> Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to." <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" <sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

<sup>35</sup> **'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'**

## Philippians 1:21-30

**<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.**

<sup>27</sup> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit,<sup>[a]</sup> striving together as one for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. **This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.**

## Matthew 20:1-16

**20** 'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius<sup>[a]</sup> for the day and **sent them into his vineyard.**

<sup>3</sup> 'About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the market-place doing nothing. <sup>4</sup> He told them, "You also **go and work in my vineyard**, and I will pay you whatever is right." <sup>5</sup> So they went.

'He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

<sup>7</sup> "'Because no one has hired us," they answered.

'He said to them, "**You also go and work in my vineyard.**"

**<sup>8</sup> 'When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first."**

<sup>9</sup> 'The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup> "These who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day."

<sup>13</sup> 'But he answered one of them, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

**<sup>16</sup> 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'**



## Philippians 2:1-13

**2** Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death –  
even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup> **Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – **continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,** <sup>13</sup> **for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.**

## Matthew 21:23-32

<sup>23</sup> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you this authority?'

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup> John's baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?'

They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will ask, "Then why didn't you believe him?"' <sup>26</sup> But if we say, "Of human origin" – we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.'

<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.'

Then he said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

<sup>28</sup> 'What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard."

<sup>29</sup> "'I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> 'Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> 'Which of the two did what his father wanted?'

'The first,' they answered.

**Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.**

### Philippians 3:4b-14

<sup>4</sup> If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

**<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but **I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.** <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> **I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.**

### Matthew 21:33-46

<sup>33</sup> Listen to another parable: there was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall round it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. <sup>34</sup> **When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.**

<sup>35</sup> The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. "They will respect my son," he said.

<sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

<sup>40</sup> Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?'

<sup>41</sup> **'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'**

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvellous in our eyes"?

<sup>43</sup> **'Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.** <sup>44</sup> Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.'

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. <sup>46</sup> They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

## Philippians 4:1-9

**4** Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

<sup>2</sup> I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. **The Lord is near.** <sup>6</sup> **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** <sup>7</sup> **And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

## Matthew 22:1-14

**22** Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup> 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup> **He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.**

<sup>4</sup> 'Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet."

<sup>5</sup> 'But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. <sup>6</sup> The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> **The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.**

<sup>8</sup> 'Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. <sup>9</sup> So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." <sup>10</sup> **So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.**

<sup>11</sup> **'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.** <sup>12</sup> He asked, "How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?" The man was speechless.

<sup>13</sup> **'Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

<sup>14</sup> **'For many are invited, but few are chosen.'**

## 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

<sup>2</sup>We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and **your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

<sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup>And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, <sup>9</sup>for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>**and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

## Matthew 22:15-22

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. <sup>16</sup>They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. <sup>17</sup>Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the poll-tax<sup>[a]</sup> to Caesar or not?'

<sup>18</sup>But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? <sup>19</sup>Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, <sup>20</sup>and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'

<sup>21</sup>'Caesar's,' they replied.

Then he said to them, 'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'

<sup>22</sup>When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

## 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

2 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. 2 We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, **we speak as those approved by God** to be entrusted with the gospel. **We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.** 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. 6 **We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.** 7 Instead, we were like young children<sup>[a]</sup> among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

## Matthew 22:34-46

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'

37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>[a]</sup> 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself."<sup>[b]</sup> 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, **Jesus asked them, 42 'What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?'**

**'The son of David,' they replied.**

43 He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"? For he says,

44 "'The Lord said to my Lord:

'Sit at my right hand  
until I put your enemies  
under your feet.'"<sup>[c]</sup>

45 **If then David calls him "Lord", how can he be his son?'** 46 No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

## 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13, 19

<sup>9</sup> Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. <sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. <sup>11</sup> For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, <sup>12</sup> **encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.**

<sup>13</sup> And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

<sup>19</sup> **For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Indeed, you are our glory and joy.**

## Matthew 24:1-14

**24** Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. <sup>2</sup> 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'

<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Messiah," and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of birth-pains.

<sup>9</sup> 'Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. <sup>10</sup> At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, <sup>11</sup> and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. <sup>12</sup> **Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, <sup>13</sup> but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**



## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

<sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, **we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.** <sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so **we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.** <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> **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.** <sup>17</sup> **After 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 for ever.** <sup>18</sup> **Therefore encourage one another with these words.**

## Matthew 25:1-13

**25** 'At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> **The bridegroom was a long time in coming,** and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

<sup>6</sup> 'At midnight the cry rang out: **"Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"**

<sup>7</sup> 'Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out."

<sup>9</sup> "No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves."

<sup>10</sup> 'But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup> 'Later the others also came. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us!"

<sup>12</sup> 'But he replied, **"Truly I tell you, I don't know you."**

<sup>13</sup> **'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

5 Now, brothers and sisters, **about times and dates we do not need to write to you,** <sup>2</sup> **for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.** <sup>3</sup> **While people are saying, 'Peace and safety', destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.**

<sup>4</sup> But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that **this day** should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then, let us not be like others, **who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.** <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. <sup>11</sup> **Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**

## Matthew 25:14-30

<sup>14</sup> 'Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,<sup>[a]</sup> each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. <sup>16</sup> The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. <sup>17</sup> So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. <sup>18</sup> But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

<sup>19</sup> **'After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.** <sup>20</sup> The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

<sup>21</sup> 'His master replied, **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"**

<sup>22</sup> 'The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold: see, I have gained two more."

<sup>23</sup> 'His master replied, **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"**

<sup>24</sup> 'Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. <sup>25</sup> So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

<sup>26</sup> 'His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? <sup>27</sup> Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, **so that when I returned** I would have received it back with interest."

<sup>28</sup> "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. <sup>29</sup> For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. <sup>30</sup> And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

## **Ephesians 1:15-23**

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit<sup>[a]</sup> of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> **I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe.** That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

## **Matthew 25:31-46**

<sup>31</sup> **'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.**

<sup>34</sup> 'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

<sup>37</sup> 'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?"

<sup>40</sup> 'The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

<sup>41</sup> 'Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was ill and in prison and you did not look after me."

<sup>44</sup> 'They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or ill or in prison, and did not help you?"

<sup>45</sup> 'He will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

<sup>46</sup> 'Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.'

## 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

<sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup> For in him you have been enriched in every way – with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge – <sup>6</sup> God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift **as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.** <sup>8</sup> **He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.** <sup>9</sup> **God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

## Mark 13:24-37

<sup>24</sup> 'But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;

<sup>25</sup> the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>26</sup> '**At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.** <sup>27</sup> **And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.**

<sup>28</sup> 'Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, **you know that it is near, right at the door.** <sup>30</sup> **Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.** <sup>31</sup> **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**

<sup>32</sup> '**But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** <sup>33</sup> **Be on guard! Be alert!**<sup>[c]</sup> **You do not know when that time will come.** <sup>34</sup> **It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.**

<sup>35</sup> 'Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> **If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.** <sup>37</sup> **What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!”**

## 2 Peter 3:8-15

<sup>8</sup> But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup> **as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.**<sup>[b]</sup> **That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.** <sup>13</sup> **But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

<sup>14</sup> So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. <sup>15</sup> Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him.

## Mark 1:1-8

**1** The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> the Son of God,<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>2</sup> as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way'<sup>[c]</sup> –

<sup>3</sup> 'a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
"Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him."<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> **I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'**

## 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not treat prophecies with contempt <sup>21</sup> but test them all; hold on to what is good, <sup>22</sup> reject every kind of evil.

**<sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.**

## John 1:6-8, 19-28

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> **He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.** <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>19</sup> Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders<sup>[a]</sup> in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. <sup>20</sup> He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Messiah.'

<sup>21</sup> They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?'

He said, 'I am not.'

'Are you the Prophet?'

He answered, 'No.'

<sup>22</sup> Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

**<sup>23</sup> John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Make straight the way for the Lord."'**<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Now the Pharisees who had been sent <sup>25</sup> questioned him, 'Why then do you baptise if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'

<sup>26</sup> 'I baptise with<sup>[c]</sup> water,' John replied, 'but among you stands one you do not know. <sup>27</sup> He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

<sup>28</sup> This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

## **Romans 16:25-27**

<sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with **my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,** <sup>26</sup> **but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith** – <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

## **Luke 1:26-38**

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

<sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> **You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.** <sup>32</sup> **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,** <sup>33</sup> **and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'**

<sup>34</sup> 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, '**The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called**<sup>[a]</sup> **the Son of God.** <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail.'

<sup>38</sup> 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.



## Titus 2:11-14

<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared that offers **salvation to all people**. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives **in this present age**, <sup>13</sup> **while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ**, <sup>14</sup> **who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**

## Luke 2:1-14

**2** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while<sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, '**Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.** <sup>11</sup> **Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.** <sup>12</sup> **This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'**

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

### Isaiah 61:10-62:3

<sup>10</sup> I delight greatly in the Lord;  
my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation  
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,  
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup> For as the soil makes the young plant come up  
and a garden causes seeds to grow,  
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness  
and praise spring up before all nations.

**62** For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,  
**till her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch.**

**<sup>2</sup> The nations will see your vindication,  
and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.**

**<sup>3</sup> You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand,  
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.**

### Luke 2:15-21

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

<sup>21</sup> On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, **he was named Jesus**, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.