

HOPE CONFERENCE (2021) Devotions

WAITING IN HOPE

*Life between now
and our glorious end*



The Oxford Languages Dictionary defines hope as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen.” To hope is to “want something to happen or be the case.”

As world events shake the foundations of our lives, people search for hope to cling onto. There are hopes for a cure to the virus. People set their hopes on an economic recovery. They hope that somehow, there will be a better tomorrow.

But for believers, hope goes beyond a desire for something to happen. The events around the world remind us of our blessed hope – “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13)

And **this hope** that we have is not a mere desire,

*It is a
Firm expectation
from the
Word of God*

In Matthew 24-25, the writer describes Jesus leaving the temple in Jerusalem and His teaching to the disciples about the events at the end of time.

The 10 days of devotionals dive into this account to surface the timeless teaching of Jesus about the end, and to expound on Jesus’ exhortations for His followers as we await and look towards this end.

Let us embark on this journey and grow to be assured of this blessed hope that we have. While we wait in hope, we live our lives in anticipation of our glorious eternity with God.

Day 1

THERE IS AN END TO THIS LIFETIME

MATTHEW 24:1-3

¹ Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ² “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.”

³ 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?”

You may have heard the phrase ‘empires rise and fall.’ One of the greatest ones, according to the Guinness World Records, was the Persian Empire which at its height accounted for approximately 44% of the world’s population. Yet, for all its greatness, it fell to Alexander the Great in 333 BC. Ironically, Alexander also fell in 323 BC, as the cycle continues. Centuries later, people hold today’s tech empires in the same regard. But they, too, come and go. Throughout history, no single person or institution could ever last through the ages.

In Matthew 24:1-3, after engaging and rebuking the religious Jewish leaders (Matthew 23), Jesus walks away from the temple, both literally and symbolically. He prophetically proclaims the temple’s coming destruction, shocking the disciples who held the temple in high regard. The temple was central to their Jewish identity. They could never have imagined that the destruction of the temple would symbolise the rejection of the existing order of worship

and mark a new covenant. There would be a new age of Christ-centred worship and eventually, Jesus would return at His Second Coming. This would mark the end of the age, the end of this lifetime.

Whether they are great empires, accomplished individuals, or grand architecture, we know for certain that all of these will pass away. Ultimately, they will surely come to an end because there will surely be an end to this lifetime when Jesus returns.

Despite knowing this, we too can fall into the trap of focusing on our lives on earth, just like how the disciples valued the grand temple. We hope that in this lifetime we could have many awards and accolades to show how well we have lived. We may even have the intention to faithfully steward the gifts and talents that God has blessed us with. But will we become so attached to the good things of the world that we no longer long for His coming? Would we live consciously of eternity and be keenly aware that what we treasure on earth would one day turn to dust, just as how the temple was turned to dust?

Jesus’ words of His return remind us to see beyond the days we have in this life. While we may strive for grades in our schooling years, list down milestones to achieve after marriage, design intricate plans towards early retirement, let us live with conscious awareness that life in Christ is more than all of these. Set towards the eternal life promised to us, we live in eagerness, awaiting His return.

The end will surely come, but how well we finish the race rests on intentional decisions that we make each day. With the end vividly in mind, may earthly possessions have a weaker hold on us, may people’s expectation weigh lighter on us, and let us anchor our lives on the everlasting hope that will surely fulfil us.

"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."
~ C.S. Lewis

Will we become so attached to the good things of the world that we no longer long for His coming?



PRAYER POINTS

1) Ask God to reveal to you how you might be more fascinated with something that is of this world rather than what will last through the ages.

2) Pray for a renewal of mind to live not by sight but by faith, to understand that our God and His Kingdom are from everlasting to everlasting.



Day 2 KEEP A CLOSE WATCH

MATTHEW 24:4-8

⁴ Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you.

⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains.

"He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."
Ecclesiastes 3:11b

God has put in mankind a special interest for eternity; Humans instinctively ponder over and look out for signs on how things will unfold in the future. This has led to believers watching for events that point to the coming of Christ as revealed in the Word. Uncommon cosmic signs like the 'blood moon' has drawn such fascination. COVID-19 has been predicted by some to herald the end of the world. The list goes on.

The disciples too, were curious about the signs of the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus made it clear that false messiahs, wars, and environmental issues such as famines and earthquakes would occur. Yet, these signs did not mean that His Second Coming would happen immediately after; they are only indicators that point towards the nearness of His coming. Jesus described these as 'birth pains.'

The Old Testament prophets often used 'birth pains' to describe an expected time of suffering before God delivers His people. Prior to the birth of a baby, there are waves of contractions. While mothers do not know if the baby will emerge on the tenth or the hundredth contraction, they can sense the nearness of the birth from the increase in frequency and pain of contractions. In the same way, the signs that Jesus stated may come in repeated bouts. With increasing frequency and escalating impact, they remind us of His impending coming.

There is an allure for us to predict when the end will come based on our interpretation of the Bible. There will be many who will be led astray, deceived by convincing speakers or grand ideas into distracted living. With the breakdown of moral values and increasing chaos and hostility in the world, there is no doubt that we are on the way to the end of the age.

But our call as believers is not to speculate based on signs; it is to be watchful and discerning of the times. We must hold on to the word of truth, to be ready but not to be alarmed into thinking that we are already at the end.

As a church, we live in the 'in between' – looking toward Christ's Second Coming while living our lives fully for the long haul. We are neither caught off guard over sensationalism of events, nor are we fooled into thinking that the end is distant. Signs do not distract us from living our lives fully for Christ. They remind us to prepare for the birth pains that will happen with the accumulation of sin in the world.

Consequently, we do not spread speculation. We spread the gospel of truth.

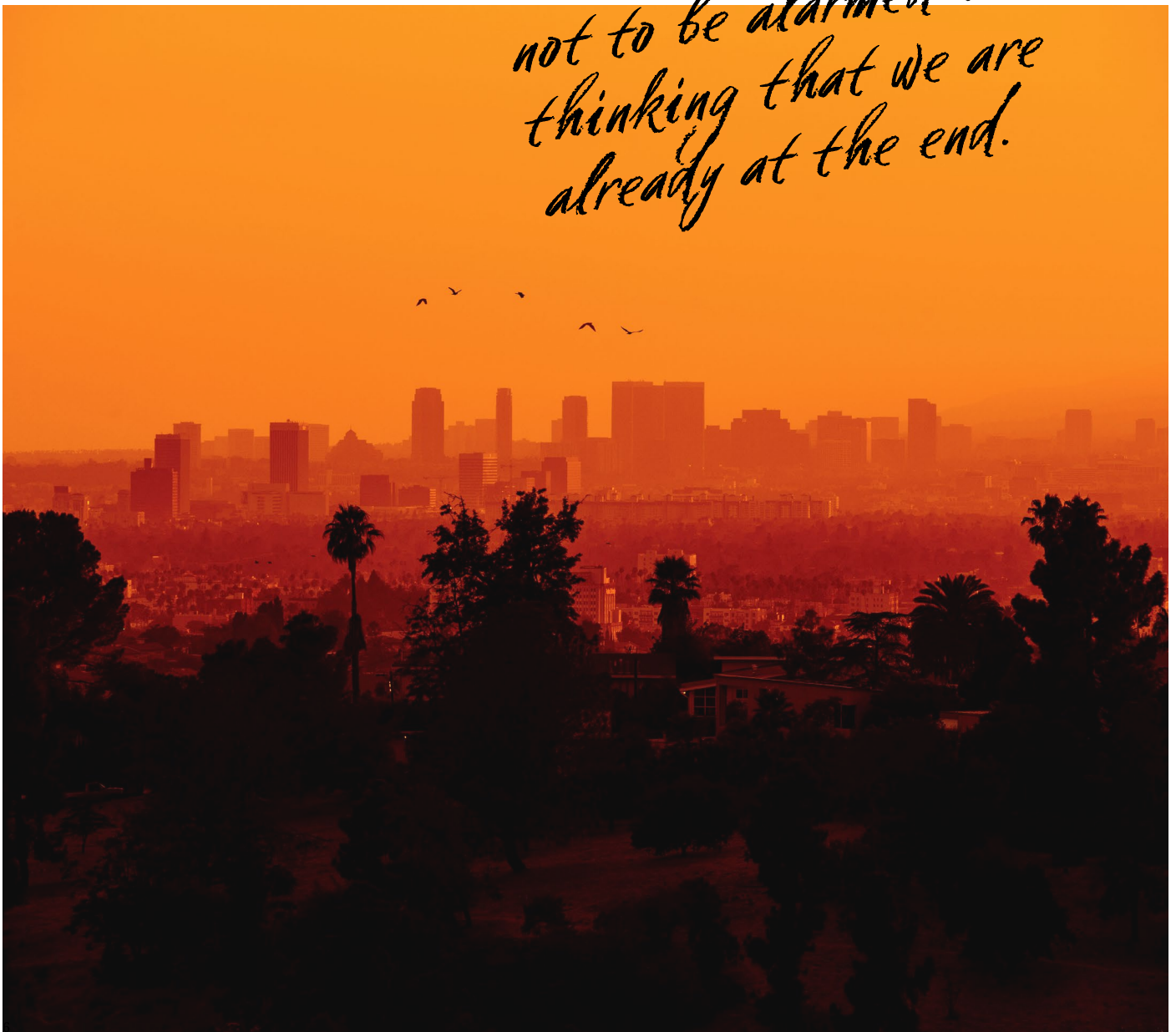
We take heart, for after the pain of childbirth, deliverance will come, and all things shall be restored.



1) What are some things that easily distract you from centring your life on Christ on a daily basis? Pray for strength to focus on Him and His Word, and to keep watch in our everyday lives.

2) *“Lord Jesus Christ, you have prepared a quiet place for us in your Father’s eternal home. Watch over our welfare on this perilous journey, shade us from the burning heat of day, and keep our lives free of evil until the end. Amen.”*
~ The Liturgy of the Hours,
Volume III

*We must hold on to
the word of truth,
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already at the end.*



Day 3 THERE IS VICTORY AMID TRIALS

MATTHEW 24:9-14

⁹ “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ 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.

Do you think twice about carrying a Bible or reading a Christian book in public? Do you fear for your safety when traveling to church services? While people in Singapore are privileged to worship freely, Open Doors International reports that over 340 million Christians suffer persecution around the world. Close to 5,000 fellow brothers and sisters in the faith were estimated to have been killed in 2020.

Jesus’ foretelling of the difficulties that the church would come to face does not surprise us. Persecution, false prophets, and people falling away have occurred and continue to occur. Perhaps we could be facing opposition at home or in the marketplace. We remember the sadness when fellow believers, friends, and family who have journeyed, “grown up in church” with us turn away from God. We know what it feels like when our communities struggle to love one another.

The thought of facing troubles as a Christian may scare us. From His words, Jesus reminds us that as challenging as it may be, physical death and earthly suffering are not the worst things that could happen to us. Instead, being separated from God eternally because of our sin is. Therefore, He died on the cross as a ransom for our sins; we follow Jesus because we believe what He has done, and who He says He is.

Thus, in the face of all these troubles, Jesus’ call for his followers remains plain. It is to stand firm in our salvation. While we grieve with fellow believers who struggle and reach those who have turned away, let us take heart because Jesus knows all things from the beginning to the end of time. He has already alerted us to it. He is in control! It is precisely in such times that we proclaim Christ, a light in the darkness.

We believe that we have victory in Christ amid trials.

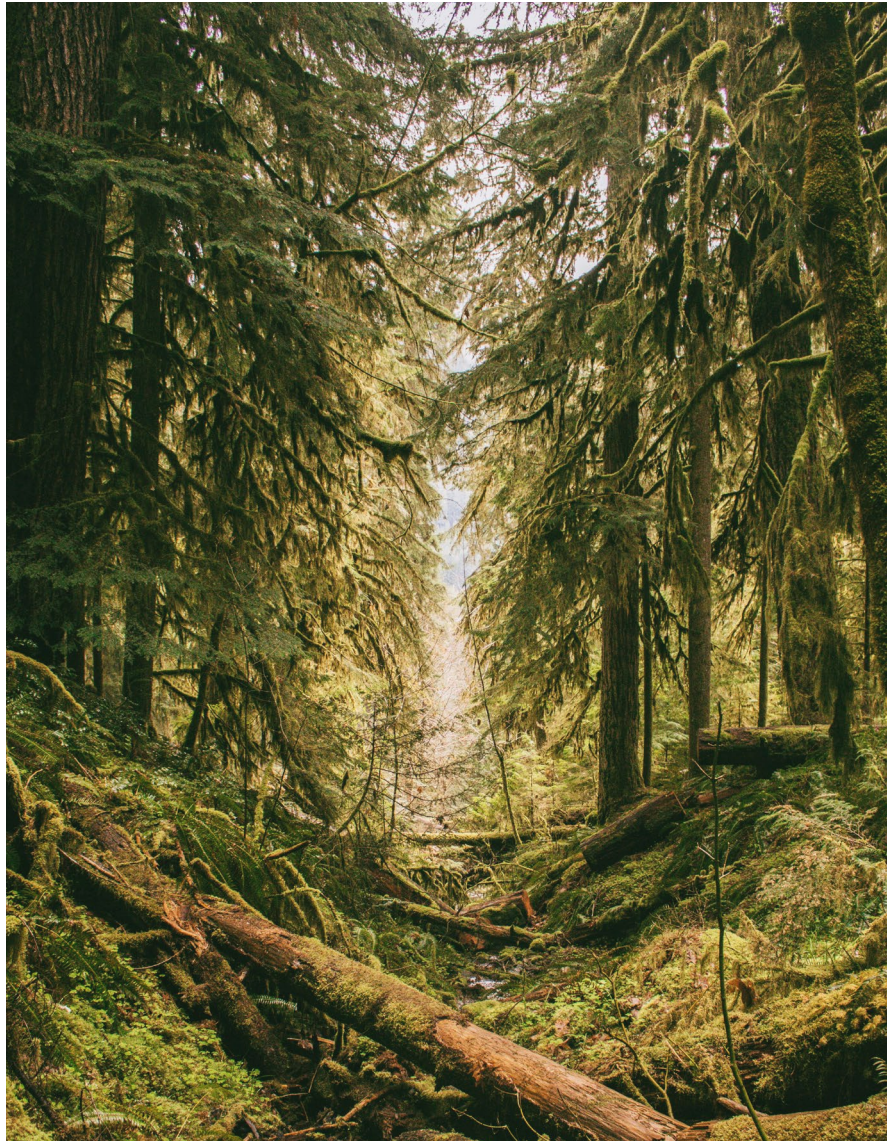
How are we struggling through persecution? In whatever opposition you or fellow believers may be going through, let us pray that God would help us see the worth of our salvation, which far outstrips any pain and suffering on earth.

What is our heart for people who have fallen away? Let us cultivate a love and burden for them, and for people who do not know Jesus today. Let us intercede for them.

Jesus cares for His followers deeply that He is willing to die on the cross for us. He calls us to preach the gospel bravely, even knowing of the trials we may face, because there is something more important than physical death. The good news needs to reach people, so that they can partake in the joy of salvation like we do. We can be comforted that there is victory amid trials, as the gospel would be carried to many people, particularly in such difficult times (v14)!

*“Father of all, we give you
thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off
you met us in your Son and
brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared
your love,
gave us grace, and opened the
gate of glory.
May we who share Christ’s body
live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life
to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give
light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you
have set before us,
so we and all your children
shall be free,
and the whole earth live
to praise your name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.”*

~ Prayer after Communion
from New Patterns for Worship



PRAYER POINTS

1) Think about people whom you know have fallen away from Christ. Pray that they would be convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit once again. Pray for opportunities to be a channel that God uses to reach them.

2) Despite the trials, the gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations. Pray that our lives will continue to be pointers for the watching world towards Jesus even amid challenges. Who might you start this conversation with today?

*How are we struggling
through persecution?*

*What is our heart
for people who have
fallen away?*



**BATTLE BELONGS
(PHIL WICKHAM)**



Day 4

HIS WORD STANDS TRUE

MATTHEW 24:15-28

¹⁵ “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house.

¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

²² “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. ²³ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.

²⁶ “So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

We have probably seen payments made in cheques at least once in our lives. Can you imagine your surprise if the bank tells you that the cheque you deposited has bounced? It makes us wonder if the person who issued the cheque is reliable and can be trusted at their word. In a world where experience may make us wonder if certain people and their words are trustworthy, Jesus proves He is a man of His word. He shows us that we can take His word to the bank.

After describing the general conditions of the world until His return, Jesus points to an event prophesied in Daniel 9:27, ‘the abomination that causes desolation.’ This prediction refers to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, one of the most distressing times for the early church. To prepare His followers, Jesus urged them to flee at the first sign of it; they ought not look back.

Jesus foretold this not to satisfy His disciples’ curiosity, but to guide them to prepare and live in such times. He is a good shepherd. Crucially, the fulfilment of His prophecy in A.D. 70 points us to the reliability of Jesus’ words. If the temple has fallen as foretold, we can similarly trust in Jesus’ words on the future. The promise of His Second Coming for us is trustworthy!

What a powerful reminder of His sovereignty and His heart as we navigate the trials of this world. Distress will arise in the ‘Great Tribulation’ as we persevere in this race towards the end. False teachers who can do signs and wonders will attempt to mislead us. Jesus reveals these in advance that we can stand firm and find strength in His Word. He will return, but not in a secretive way. As lightning flashes across the sky, He will return in a way both plain and spectacular. All will know of His return.

Though the Great Tribulation may be a distant concept for some of us, we will certainly face challenges in life – from sickness to failure. If we are not facing these challenges, let us then train in good times so that we may last in tough times.

How can we hold fast to our disciple-making tradition, ground ourselves upon the gospel, and prepare future generations for what is to come?

Any generation that fails to pass it on will break the chain of

discipleship, and the generation after will struggle with resilience. Thus, we convey sound doctrine that will continue to be passed down. We teach one another that we have a great cloud of witnesses in the Christian walk, stretching from generations past, and that Jesus anchors our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).

As we draw ever nearer towards the end, it is by the grace of God that we find strength in our weakness to last. Above all, we are assured because we can take Jesus' word to the bank.



[HOLY AND
ANointed ONE
\(VINEYARD WORSHIP\)](#)



PRAYER POINTS

1) We cannot cruise through life as a believer and expect to have moral strength to go through tough times. Pray that we can grow in resilience through our daily God-honouring decisions. How can we start today?

2) Do you face opposition or persecution? Believers around the world may be enduring through such times. They may even be around us. Pray for ourselves (them), that God will strengthen us in the assurance of our salvation.

*Jesus proves He is
a man of His word.
He shows us that
we can take His word
to the bank.*

Day 5 HE WILL GET US HOME

MATTHEW 24:29-31

²⁹ “Immediately after the distress of those days
“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

³⁰ “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.
And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they
see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with
power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with
a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the
four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

“We will get you home.”

~ Words written by nurses on a window, to a COVID-19 patient isolated in intensive care at Cleveland Clinic, USA.

If you or your loved ones have ever spent time in a hospital, you will recognise the anticipation of being able to simply go home. We long for home because it represents solace and comfort; it is an end to the pain. We find that same longing when we experience other sources of pain. Some of us have strained relationships. Others have financial difficulties. We may have seen our loved ones pass on. The list is unending on this side of heaven as none of us can avoid the effects of the fall.

Many of us have wondered where God is in the midst of our struggles. Yet, in Matthew 24:29-31, we can find hope because Jesus will answer our longing for home. Jesus will get us home.

Jesus describes His future glorious return, ‘when the sun becomes darkened and the moon does not shine.’ Even celestial bodies will tremble, and stars will fall at His arrival. This will be the day when Jesus comes to fully establish His Kingdom here on earth. This is the day that we who have salvation in Christ hope for. Those who belong to Him will be gathered to Him with a loud trumpet call that signals the end of this age.

It will bring the end to all suffering. Pain will cease. There will be no more betrayals, no more heartaches. Evil is overcome.

The age to come will be glorious beyond our wildest imaginations! Peace and joy will abound. The majestic return of Christ marks the end of the present age and points us to the wonderful eternity we have with God. Are you longing for that?

It is not wishful thinking. It is a firm expectation.

This present age will continue to bring about death and suffering. For much of the world, they will continue to cause despair. But for the believer, they have no power over us because of our hope in Jesus. While death and suffering humble and remind us how we are vulnerable and without control of our lives, we know that they have been defeated on the cross at Calvary, and that Christ is coming again.

We know that our salvation is secure, and we will be with Jesus eternally when He brings us home. Pain is no longer meaningless when seen through the lens of the Second Coming. It reminds us that we are bound for home.

^{3b} *“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

⁴ *‘He will wipe every tear from*

their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
Revelation 21:3b-4

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PRAYER POINTS

1) As you seek God today, spend some time picturing the return of Christ in all its glory as described in Matthew and in Revelation. When life's hardships beset you, ask God to help you find hope and courage to endure, remembering that our great Saviour will one day come again to bring us home.

2) Pray that more than earthly riches, our hearts will long for what is eternal, long for Christ to return and establish His Kingdom.

[PROMISES
\(MAVERICK CITY\)](#)



Day 6

PREPARE BEFORE THE END

MATTHEW 24:32-44

³² “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. ³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁴ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁶ “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ 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.

Have you ever considered adjusting certain lifestyle habits to be healthier? We may know of friends who overhauled their lives when they realised from a health screening that their activity (or lack thereof) is catching up to them in a bad way. Conversely, we may know of others who remain unmoved. Their diet, exercise, and way of life continue unchanged.

People respond differently despite knowing what may be looming. But what is our mindset towards Jesus and His return? If we would change our habits for our physical health, what would we do for our spiritual health? If we are indifferent about our physical health, do we view our spiritual health in the same way?

As surely as the sun rises, Jesus will return for us one day. What is also certain is that the day and time of His return are unknown. Jesus even told the disciples that He had no knowledge and only the Father knows when that day would arrive. No one else knows, not even Jesus.

Although it is certain that He will return, Jesus forewarned that some would still be found unprepared. In the passage, He likened the days leading up to His return to the days of Noah. Then, people went about their lives as usual, wrapped up in their everyday concerns but without concern for spiritual realities or righteousness. When the waters came in a flood, they were caught off-guard. Jesus urged his disciples to remain vigilant and to stay on course although the day of His return is unknown.

This exhortation is for us to heed today. At times we may lose the sense of alertness to live as one prepared for and expecting Jesus' return. Perhaps it is because Jesus foretold it two thousand years ago, and many generations have since come and gone. His return may feel like a distant future that may not even take place within our lifetime. With much comfort in our lives today, the need for vigilance could appear less pressing and tangible.

We may know that Jesus and His return is important, but we may relegate its importance in the busyness and pleasures of our everyday. Yet, if the owner of the house knows a thief will come, to fall asleep and hope to wake up

'just-in-time' is simply foolishness. If we have done so, perhaps we may subconsciously think Jesus is not returning after all.



[SHOUT TO THE LORD](#)
[\(DARLENE ZSCHECH\)](#)



Rather, let us avoid falling asleep to the reality of His coming, and live out our calling faithfully. To live wisely and truthfully as children of God, servants of the kingdom and priests on behalf of the people. Let us make decisions about our time and actions in light of our assured future with Christ. In the coming days, we will explore what this means in our lives.

How is your preparation? We do not prepare for the end only when we are at the end, for no one knows when the end is. If Jesus were to return today, would you be prepared to meet Him?



PRAYER POINTS

1) When the return of Christ is lodged firmly in our hearts, it brings along with it a clarity in the priorities of our lives. Pray that as we go about our days, we do not get distracted by the many things in our lives, but remain faithful, focused on His call.

2) "Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen."

~ Thomas Aquinas

*To live wisely
and truthfully as
children of God,
servants of the kingdom
and priests on behalf
of the people.*

Day 7 NOT COMPLACENT BUT URGENT

MATTHEW 24:45-51

⁴⁵ “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷ Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As the clock strikes 2am, a burglar successfully enters a home in Thailand. With the house at his mercy, he can make off with whatever he wants and escape into the night. Perhaps at the corner of his eye he notices a comfortable-looking bed. What is the harm of a little nap in the middle of robbery? He proceeds to lie down. He later awakens to a policeman – the houseowner and finds himself under arrest. Incredibly, he is not the only burglar complacent enough to fall asleep on the ‘job’; news has reported similar incidents in UK, India, Ireland, and so on.

Complacency often results in the worst kind of consequences. But it is not that single moment which leads to our troubles. More likely, complacency begins as a false sense of security grows and takes

root from within. As complacency grows, our lives begin to turn away from living with urgency and responsibility before God.

The parable of the two servants sets forth what we must do now, in view of Jesus’ future return. Will we be like the wicked servant who gave the excuse that his master was not returning for a long while, presuming that Jesus’ coming will surely not be in our lifetime? Or worse – could we have forgotten that we have a calling as Christ followers, and ignored His return completely?

Just like the master, Jesus will come on a day we do not expect or know. There will be heavy judgment for those who have not been faithful and who have been occupied with their own desires (v50-51). To think that we will always have time to change to ‘be good’ later – to delay repentance and turn to God ‘tomorrow’; that is misguided complacency. English preacher Thomas Watson once said,

“By delay of repentance, sin strengthens, and the heart hardens. The longer ice freezes, the harder it is to be broken.”

A light view of sin disregards God’s presence and His coming judgment. It leads us to think we can be complacent about our sins and take God’s grace for granted.

Rather than complacency, the parable invites us to live with a sense of urgency – to recognise that repentance and obedience to God begins today. This way of life leads us away from the path of the hypocritical servant – one that outwardly carries the form of a believer but is inwardly self-indulgent.

Ultimately, the parable challenges us to revere Jesus as Lord in our hearts, shown through the manner of our living.

Shall we courageously allow the Word of God to be a mirror to us and reveal what is in our hearts

(James 1:22-25)? Let us not dally, for there is no greater urgency than to turn to Him and walk in His ways.

*To delay repentance
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PRAYER POINTS

1) Pray that the Holy Spirit will convict our hearts with a right view of our sins and spur us to repent with urgency today.

2) What are the things God has called you to do? Perhaps there are people you can love, serve, and reach. Perhaps there is someone to forgive. Whatever they might be, pray that you may take courage to do what God has already revealed to you.



[YOU ARE LIFE
\(HILLSONG\)](#)



Day 8

NOT IGNORANT BUT PREPARED

MATTHEW 25:1-13

¹ “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹ “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.’

¹⁰ “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.

¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

¹² “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Many of us can still recall how, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, long queues of shoppers swarmed grocery stores. The shelves were practically emptied of essentials like rice, noodles and even toilet paper! This wave of panic buying left many latecomers anxiously wondering if they could sustain through a lockdown.

Today, we can chuckle at this memory as we look back, and joke among friends how all this probably contributed to Sheng Siong’s windfall year. But a truth remains clear: we are often unprepared for the curveballs that life throws at us. And we typically overreact to compensate – sometimes too little, too late.

Scripture reminds us that an even more significant incident is surely coming – Jesus will return. While we do not know when that day is, the implications for being unprepared are far more serious; the doors to His Kingdom will be shut (v10). The parable of the ten virgins is a vivid picture of what it looks like when we do not prepare for the long haul. In the context of a wedding, being designated as a bridesmaid is a great honour. Hence, to be unprepared and shut out of the feast is truly a nightmare for the five young women.

Those who were deemed “wise” were ready for the long wait, for they took flasks of olive oil to keep their lamps from going out. Conversely, the “foolish” ones had to spend extra time to rectify their ignorance by purchasing the oil. Sadly, they were too late for the wedding banquet and were rejected with this comment from the bridegroom: “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.” (v12)

As believers, we are like the ten virgins bound for the banquet. We are not strangers to the Kingdom. Indeed, we do not set out to fall away, and have taken our lamps – taken some steps to be prepared. But have we prepared ourselves to walk with God to the very end?

In this long-distance journey of faith, we must not be ignorant of the opposition and temptations in our lives that snare us. All of us have personal struggles to overcome. All of us must have ‘oil’ to protect our walk as believers. Do we study Scripture, arming ourselves with God’s truth

in a postmodern world? Do we invite mentors to keep ourselves accountable so that we may not fall – or even when we do, to have the support to repent and return to God?

The parable particularly carries a poignant question for many long-time believers. After the many years, do you still have oil in your lamp?

Most of us are not completely ignorant of what we must do, but we overestimate ourselves, and do not go all the way to arrive and finish well before God. We neglect our oil. But discipleship is a journey that takes place over a lifetime, requiring our effort each and every day. Shall we humbly ask God to give us oil in our lamps?

*“Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning
Give me oil in my lamp, I pray
Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning
Keep me burning ‘til the break of day”*
~ Hymn - “Give Me Oil in My Lamp”

PRAYER POINTS

- 1) Pray that as believers, we will neither be ignorant nor complacent of what stumbles us. Pray that we will be committed to go all the way, practising daily effort, to be faithful and to grow, so as to finish our Christian walk well.
- 2) Pray for fellow believers and their walk with Jesus, knowing that their holiness is also our responsibility.

*After the many years,
do you still have
oil in your lamp?*



[OUR GOD](#)
[\(CHRIS TOMLIN\)](#)



Day 9 NOT IDLE BUT FAITHFUL

MATTHEW 25:14-30

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more.

¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.

¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ 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.’

²¹ “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!’

²² “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.’

²³ “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!’

²⁴ “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. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “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? ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

On 24 November 2020, a Facebook post highlighted an unsung hero – a food deliveryman trudging through the rain barefooted, his hands carrying bags of food. In just four hours, the post garnered over 1,700 shares with comments such as these:

“Salute.”

“Man! You have my respect ... Regardless of rain and sunshine!”

The chorus of affirmation points us to appreciate the deliveryman and his virtuous responsibility. Just as we recognise and praise the faithfulness of people in action, Matthew 25:14-30 shows us that God similarly calls for and affirms faithfulness to Him.

Before the master embarks on his journey, he entrusts his wealth to his servants. Though each was given a different amount, a single bag of gold was no small sum, amounting to 20 years of a day labourer’s wage. They were called to be faithful stewards of their master’s wealth, to the extent he knew them to be capable of stewarding.

When the master returned, he praised the first two servants, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” He commended them not for their earnings, but for their faithful responsibility. But to the third servant who was idle and buried the gold, the master replied, “You wicked, lazy servant!” He was deemed unfaithful.

Jesus is the master. He has ascended, but He is returning. Till then, He entrusts to each of us a part of the redemptive plan of God, a part to play in the Great Commission. Whatever part we play is according to the giftings, talents, and resources that we have, which come from God and are for God (Romans 11:36).

All of us have people we are uniquely in position to speak to.

We have areas of service we are burdened over. We have God-given resources to contribute. With what we have, we are called to be faithful to the Great Commission as we go about our lives, making disciples in our households, our vocations, and our spheres of influence.

How are we being faithful to the part of the Great Commission Jesus has entrusted to us? What would the church look like if each of us begin to consider how we can be faithful to the Great Commission with our today?

Though each of us are different and have different parts to play, we are all entrusted with the same one mission which we are to be faithful in
- the Great Commission.

It is liberating to know that the master did not display favouritism according to the bags of gold. Similarly, Jesus does not show favouritism according to the roles we are called to play. Whatever the abilities we have and whatever the part we are called to play, there is no insignificant role in the Great Commission.

Because, in the final analysis, Jesus calls for our faithfulness. It is God who brings forth the fruit. J.I. Packer once wrote,

"Faithfulness is our business; fruitfulness is an issue that we must be content to leave with God."

So, let us be freed from weariness of achieving results on our own. Let us shed any insecurity that hinders us from participating in the Kingdom of God. We need not compare with others because we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is returning. He will ask us how we have fared with what He has committed to our care. And He longs to commend us, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

PRAYER POINTS

1) Pray and ask God what is a part of the Great Commission that you can play. Take time to discuss with fellow believers and join in faithfulness together as we long for this commendation from Jesus.

2) Do you face insecurities over your capability, or weariness over a period of service? Pray for your heart to entrust the fruitfulness to God, and to take courage to simply be faithful before Him.

[HAVE MY HEART
\(MAVERICK CITY\)](#)



How are we being faithful to the part of the Great Commission Jesus has entrusted to us?



Day 10

NOT INVOLVED BUT COMMITTED

MATTHEW 25:31-46

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

³² 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. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “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.

³⁵ 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, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “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.’

⁴¹ “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. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “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.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Here is a question. In a bacon-and-eggs breakfast, what is the difference between the Chicken and the Pig?

The Chicken that offers its egg is involved, but the Pig that offers itself as bacon is committed!

When we encounter someone facing hardships, our first instinct will frequently be to pray for them. We offer prayers and speak words of encouragement to them, reminding them of God’s faithfulness and love.

But the passage points us to a love that goes beyond prayers. Jesus describes an event that will take place at His return. The sheep and goats will be separated. The King addresses the sheep as “blessed by my Father.” Their blessing is Kingdom inheritance, a gift of their relationship with the Father and the Son. Their hallmark is the acts of love towards the brothers and sisters of the King, even to the “least” of them.

On the other hand, the goats are condemned to eternal punishment, not for some outwardly atrocious sin, but for their simple neglect to love like how the righteous sheep did. In short, Jesus affirms that believers are to care for one another, especially the seemingly least and less significant in the body of Christ.

It may seem incredibly trivial at first sight that Jesus’ judgment towards distinguishing believers rests upon how they have (or have neglected) to love their fellow believers. Yet, this should not surprise us as Jesus had said that people will recognise Christ followers through their love for one another (John 13:35).

And when we look at the life of Jesus, He got his hands dirty to love. The love of Christ goes beyond the modern idea of defining love as a feeling. Love was demonstrated as action

through Jesus' death for us (Romans 5:8).

Praying for others is indeed spiritual, but on its own, it is not the Christlikeness we are called to. Jesus has shown us the model to love, and we are called to love like Jesus. This requires us to step out of our comfort zone, to go beyond being involved in prayer, to be committed in love. We are commanded to love the body of Christ not only with words but with deeds (1 John 3:18).

Love often involves effort and sacrifice. When a job is lost, are we willing to offer finances to help tide through this tough time? When a brother is struggling in academics, are we willing to help with revision? When a friend is suffering from ailing health, will we offer our time to run errands for the family? No matter the form, God's Word calls us to roll up our sleeves.

In our fast-paced living, to have space to look out for others may seem unusual. But to the watching world, this is precisely the distinctiveness that showcases the love of Christ. How we empathise, bless and love one another beyond lip service become channels for the world to see God's love.

Whatever our hindrances, we are called to love others, starting from within the body. Are there people in the church that you struggle to love? Are there instances where you have withheld meeting a need you see in that brother or sister's life? Let God's love move us to take action. He is eager to multiply what we have to offer to love.

"What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like."
~ Augustine

PRAYER POINTS

1) Have we been too busy to consider the needs of others? Take time to pause today and take steps to love someone in action.

2) If love is not a feeling but an action, what small steps can we take to actively love the body of Christ? Pray for wisdom and courage to seize such opportunities.

KING OF KINGS
(HILLSONG)



*How we empathise,
bless and love one another
beyond lip service become
channels for the world
to see God's love.*

CONCLUSION

Pure and blameless,
**TO THE GLORY AND
PRAISE OF GOD**

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.