

**‘ THEREFORE YOU ALSO MUST BE READY’ Rev’d C Vesely**  
**November 30<sup>th</sup> Reflection Advent I**

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Toward the end of the 19th century was a time of some considerable disquiet. The industrial revolution had changed the world.

Communication was now possible in real time with the grand projects of undersea cables connecting continents with telegraph. There were large leaps made in science. There were several wars taking place as fading empires were seeking to assert their fading glory and power.

New nations such as ours, soon to be a federated Commonwealth of Australia. Education in our soon to be new nation was slowly being made available to all, thanks to personas such as Sir Henry Parkes (1815-1896) with his New South Wales *Public Instruction Act 1880*, and Patrick Francis, Cardinal, Moran (1830-1911) with his vision for free education at all catholic schools.

Philosophical and political changes in ideals were also taking place. Karl Marx (1818-1883) wrote his rather long work *Das Kapital* at about this time, along with the likes of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844 –1900) published prolifically in his relatively short life. Nietzsche’s philosophy of the concept of the "will to power," the declaration that "God is dead," and the vision of the "Übermensch" or "Superman" who creates their own values, would shape the course of humankind not always for the better, into the 20th century. Society in the industrialised world was well primed to consider the question if they were living in the end times?

Yet for many ordinary people these great changes in thought, science, technology, and calamities were very far from their thinking. For many it was the hard business as usual to survive, put food on the family table, and scratch out a living existence. Any thoughts of a radical change in the future would have been met with disbelief, disinterest, and maybe even cynicism. The there, and now, and were of concern.

There were, however, some people and groups in the United States in

particular, who were very interested in the Second Coming of Christ or also called the “Second Advent.” These people read their Bibles and were influenced by events of the times into thinking of the ‘Eschaton’ or the end times.

In Pennsylvania, and then later in the New York borough of Brooklyn, a small isolated Bible Study group lead by an unknown haberdasher, by the name of Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) made an earnest study of the Scriptures, and by means and method that time does not permit us to examine now, came up with a series of key dates when he and his group believed that certain prophetic events would take place with Jesus locked in to return in 1914. When the 1914 date came and the second coming did not come about; Russell and his friends made some revisions. Ultimately the group’s second leader a lawyer by the name of Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869 - 1942) would revise the date to 1925, this date would further be moved a number of times.

Some may also recall a pastor of a congregation in Sydney’s inner suburbs about thirty or so years ago, who announced that Jesus would return on a certain date just prior to the year 2000. The media loves a story like this and quickly gathered around the pastor and his Gladesville inner suburban congregation. When on the appointed night nothing happened, the hapless pastor retreated to his study of the Bible and announced that he must have got it wrong!

It strikes as curious that with all those earnest Bible studies by many people over the years, that our reading from Matthew 24:36-44, the words of Jesus were not entered into consideration when they were tempted to predict a date or time.

If one was to consider the placement of this passage in the Gospel According to St Matthew, it is at the pinnacle of Jesus’ ministry. It is not far before the religious authorities of the day would have Jesus arrested and crucified. It is not far from when Jesus would gloriously rise from the dead. One could use some of the events of those days as indicators that the last days were upon the world. In the case of the ministry and saving act of Jesus Christ – God the Son, they were correct.

The Jewish readers of Matthew's Account of the Gospel would have known that the Messiah was due any time. There are key Jewish observances that pointed to this all backed up by the Hebrew Scriptures. However, if we accept that in this particular passage, Jesus is speaking of the Second Advent, then the key message is that the believer must be always prepared to see their Saviour face to face, for only God the Father knows the day and the hour when the Son will return.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Romans in chapter 13 is clearly anchored in this teaching of Jesus on the Second Advent. Note that St. Paul makes no claim to know the hour or day, but he is strongly urging those early Christians in Rome, to live lives that are centred in Christ, leaving aside the tempting pleasures of the time, body, and the physical world as there are no guarantees of time for anyone.

Long before St Paul, Isaiah just starting out on his prophetic ministry has a vision of the coming of the Lord. The vision tells of how all things will come under the Lord, and that humankind will be revolutionised into peacemakers and learn war no more. The Protestant Chapel at the Army Recruit Training Centre- Kapooka inspired by this passage from the Book of Isaiah, has a large floor to ceiling stained glass window, depicting a soldier beating a rifle into a ploughshare. The Window designed and built by the chaplains when the chapel was built in the 1980's wanted to remind the new soldiers that their craft will one day come to and end under not human hands but the Lord's hands.

You may be wondering why are verses more related to the Second Advent are the texts for the first Sunday of Advent, where we recall the First Advent and prepare to celebrate Christmas? It is a valid view that as Christians we must view our faith in the whole, not in some part or another isolated from each other. One could possibly point out that the central error that some of whom I have spoken of this morning was that they become obsessed with one aspect and miss out considering the full aspect of God's promise of his coming.

The collection of readings this morning and indeed for this week, should set us up for these crucial points:

**1. Centre ourselves on Christ our Saviour.**

Christ is centre of our faith and lives. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

**“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!”**

**2. Live lives submitted to Christ’s rulership.**

Being a Christian is about living a life under the new management of Jesus Christ our Saviour. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) mentioned in our Uniting Church Basis of Union<sup>1</sup> asks this question and supplies this answer:

**Q.** What is your only comfort in life and death?

**A.** That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

**3. Remembering always that we were saved by the grace and love by Jesus on the Cross.**

**4. Therefore, we live our lives always prepared to meet our Lord and Saviour,** for none know the day nor hour of His return except for our Father in Heaven.

**5. We must recognise that we live in an ever-changing world.**

No matter what our era what our world situation, technology, government, these will until Christ returns default to sinful ways. Yet the World of the Lord remains steadfast and true.

For many years on the southern side of The Salvation Army’s Sydney Headquarters at 141 Elizabeth Street, were the words of the writer of the Book of Hebrews:

## **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.<sup>2</sup>**

As people would enter the Sydney CBD there was great statement of the eternity and changelessness of Christ would greet them on their journey north up Elizabeth Street.

**6. Remember that we are the children of a promise that frees us from death and sin** and nothing can separate us from this estate. Paul wrote to the early church in Rome<sup>3</sup>:  
**For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

On this first Sunday in the season of Advent it is a timely reminder for us to be ever prepared for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to be with him or that he comes in all his glory. Along with Charles Wesley's Hymn: "Come thou long expected Jesus."

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All Bible References are from the NIV<sup>®</sup>

2 Hebrews 13:8

3 Roman 8:38-39