

Why Jesus' return to judge the living and the dead is actually good news! (hope part 1)

One sentence summary: *'He (Jesus) rose again, ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead'*

Longer summary:

Sam explained that the hope of Christ's return is not something for weirdos and eccentrics but is an essential part of the gospel and orthodox Christian faith. Our hope is not just 'heaven when we die', but **'The reuniting of God and humanity, the destruction of sin, pain, evil, suffering and death and the lordship of Christ in a renewed heavens and earth'**. If we don't know where we're going it causes us lots of problems. Our ultimate hope will shape our lives today.

(1) What's the big picture?

The return of the King. Sam talked through the big story of the Bible where God is a good and righteous King who needs to return to rescue his people (fuller notes on this section below)*

Sam showed how both Daniel 6 and 7 give us a picture of Jesus' ascension and Lordship. But if Jesus is Lord/King why is everything still such a mess? Because although Jesus is now rightful Lord he does not force his Lordship on us. Right now we all have a choice to recognise this or not. But one day, at his appearing, every knee will bow. For now, we live in the old age and new age, the now but not yet, the advent between his appearings.

2. What do we mean by Jesus' return

(i) The return of the good King to sort out the world is good news. (ii) It will be a public vindication (iii) We don't know the timing (so don't try!) (iv) He will destroy every enemy.

3. What do we mean by Judge?

A Good King has to be a judge: to decide between right and wrong and protect the abused. This can feel scary but we have to remember that ultimately his judgement is on evil itself and he is good. BUT, because evil is in the heart of humanity we're called to trust and follow him and will be judged on that relationship. Do you choose Jesus? Not just intellectually but following, imitating, doing what he says, trusting him and doing works of love?

So what? 'Jesus is Lord' means we can now begin the work that he will complete. His Spirit empowers us to renew the world: bring justice, love others, have faith, follow the spirit, have humility. (i) We can pray 'Come Lord Jesus' because we're asking for the return of the good King. We have nothing to fear. (ii) We can live 'come Lord Jesus' by making him Lord now.

Suggested questions and activities:

1. **All together:** go through the summary so that everyone is clear on the sermon. Allow questions and if you can't answer them don't try. You can e-mail the elders and we'll happily respond. Be honest if you don't know- we might not either but can try and find out for you.

2. **In pairs:** how do you honestly feel about Jesus' return? Did you learn anything new or different to what you thought before?

3. **In pairs first, then share altogether:** What do you most long for God to renew in the world? Where do you most long for the good King to sort things out? Pray into this.

4. **Altogether:** How can you as an individual and group be joining in with Jesus' ultimate work now? You might want to pray for alpha but also talk about themes such as justice, reaching those in poverty or even caring for the world or your local community.

- i. **The Bible's story is of the almighty Creator who is also father. The one who is a good King: righteous, just, fair, good, loving, faithful. A good King has to be a judge (decide between right and wrong, protect the abused/poor).*
- ii. *This good King creates the good world and reigns over it. He makes people to reign on his behalf with him.*
- iii. *But... he is love so gives them a choice to accept his Kingship. Humanity rejects this and rejects him (Gen 3)*
- iv. *In rejecting God and breaking relationship with him sin breaks in: corruption, brokenness, shame, abuse, evil, pain suffering and DEATH (Gen 4-11). What have we done? We need our King back.*
- v. *Evil spirals out of control- in the heart of humanity- we see murder and evil generation after generation- until God cries 'enough!' He cannot stand the pain any more and so ends it, by flooding and destroying nearly everyone.*
- vi. *One family trust him and are saved. And as they leave their boat after the flood he promises them- I will never destroy humanity like that again.*

Q- Big tension of the bible is set up. How will the God King beat evil without destroying humans?

If we had time could talk about: (i) God's choosing of his people and rescuing them from Egypt (ii) How he invited them to live under his law and kingship but they reject him (iii) The judges and prophets who tried to call them back to him (iv) The Kings who were chosen to rule on his behalf but instead turn to idols...

But we don't- so zoom into exile: God's people away from the land and his presence crying out that the King would return. We meet Daniel in a place called Babylon- praying to God- despite the fact that it looks like God's plan has failed.

In Daniel 6 we see faithful Daniel condemned for praying and sentenced to death by Lions (happened to early Christians and today). Looks like God's plan and faithful people (Daniel) will be destroyed.

The next morning King Darius comes- finds that Daniel has beaten death and his God has vindicated him. He's raised from the pit (ascended) and is seated at the King's right hand to rule and reign on his behalf- publically justified and vindicated.

In Daniel 7 he has a dream- really similar to his experiences: The monstrous nations coming to attack Israel and it looks like evil is winning. In a courtroom before God as judge (ancient) and someone appears to represent God's people 'one like the son of man': faithful, righteous, and in the courtroom is not defeated by evil but is vindicated and ascends to God's right hand. He's given glory, dominion, power and a kingdom. (Can you see similarity?)

What happened to Daniel and his dream was Israel's hope- that God would come back and vindicate his people. That God would return as King, rescue them and make everything right- destroying evil and sin.