In Revelation 3, Jesus tells John to write a letter to the church at Sardis, a city previously known for its wealth and splendour.

In its time it had been considered to be impregnable, being on top of a hill, with steep sides and having only one narrow route of approach.

Yet, on two occasions, this city had been attacked and conquered because the inhabitants felt so secure, the watchmen failed to do their jobs, their guard was dropped and the city was overrun.

They were both unwatchful and unprepared.

Last week’s parables of Jesus concerned the two mentions of fig trees, one illustrating the spiritual life of a person.

The other was used to show that as we watch and expect nature to progress through the seasons, we should also be watching for signs that Jesus taught us to look out for, that would prelude His Second Coming.

**SLIDE Mark 13:28-31**

Jesus said, **28“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. 29Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**

**SLIDE Mark 13:32-37**

Jesus then progressed by saying…

**32“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34It’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. 35“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 rooster crows, or at dawn. 36If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”**

The emphasis was to be ready at all times and note that Jesus made it very clear that only God the Father knows the day and hour, so don’t go running after people who claim that they know.

Just to clarify – Jesus remains, as God, all knowing, but He voluntarily on this occasion, in submission to God the Father, restricted His knowledge of this event.

You can take the attitude that, ‘we don’t know when Jesus is coming, so it doesn’t really matter,’ or, ‘we don’t know when Jesus is coming, so we have to find out and set a date, or’ we can take the right attitude which is ‘I don’t know when Jesus is coming so I have to be alert, eager, and ready for His coming.’

Jesus then spoke about how we should live until He comes.

He likens Himself to what some translation state is a **man going to a far country**, who left three things to his servants: **his house**, his **authority**, and **his work**.

The man also appoints servant to keep watch at the door. The inference is the man is going away for an unspecified period, but he may return at any time and does not want to find his servants sleeping.

The point of it all is to **Watch!**

Translating the parable into a personal message, just think what Jesus has left you:

* **His house**: The church belongs to Jesus, but He entrusts it to each one of us.
* His **authority**: We are to live and serve in the **authority** of Jesus and responsibilityis always coupled with **authority**.
* **His work**: Each servant has **his work** to do. We aren’t responsible for someone else’s work, but we certainly are responsible for ours.

That parable doesn’t give any indication of the rewards or otherwise for those who have been given authority, but Jesus’ teaching in **Luke 12:35-40** does and it follows believers being told to get ready by storing your treasures in heaven, not on earth.

**SLIDE Luke 12:35-40**

**35“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. 39But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”**

Jesus says His followers should, at all times, be focused on His return - a task which is worth applying the whole of our lives towards achieving.

Note the reward when the master returns and the servants are found ready – it is the servants who will be served, the master **will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.**

That is not the usual order of things – even after Jesus comes as a Conquering king to rule with a rod of iron, we are told that for believers in Him, He will continue to be our servant.

One writer said, ‘those servants who are alert to their master’s return will be blessed. So blessed are they, in fact, that the Lord will reverse the roles and serve them by dressing Himself to serve and seating them at the table and serving them.’

The illustrations at the beginning showed the dangers of being caught unprepared – but being unprepared when you have been warned about something that will happen is unforgiveable, especially when we have all had enough time to get ready.

Jesus quite rightly says that a thief never announces his coming; he comes at a time when you would not expect him. The way to be on guard against a thief is to live in constant readiness and the way to be ready for Jesus’ return is to live in constant readiness.

If you are wondering how we need to get ready, fortunately Peter asked the question for us.

**SLIDE Luke 12:41-44**

**41Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?” 42The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.**

Jesus make it clear that He is speaking to everyone and His expectation is that we should all be like the **faithful and wise manager,** whose reward was to be put in charge of all the master’s possessions – faithful believers are being given the promise of eternal life and all of heaven’s riches.

Whether you are ready or not, one day the master will come and you have been warned. He will punish those who were not ready and denied His coming, but will reward those who are ready.

**SLIDE Matthew 2:1-2**

**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magifrom the east came to Jerusalem 2and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”**

At advent we think of the birth of Jesus – His first coming and the Magi are a significant part of that account.

The Magi were probably a group (more than three) of astrologers, probably from Persia, who practised the ancient custom of divining knowledge from the stars and planets. To the Jews of the first century, the word “magi” referred to “magicians” or fortune tellers whose practises were strictly forbidden.

So, how did they recognise, let alone come to worship, the divine royalty of Israel?

The answer to that is they had studied the Hebrew Scriptures, which probably had been taken to Babylon along with the exile of Judah that included Daniel.

I have searched and I cannot find the Magi, called by that name, in any other Biblical book.

**SLIDE Greek and Hebrew word comparison**

So, from Scripture, we can see that the word used by Moses in his writings, Daniel in his Book and finally Matthew in the account of the Magi searching for Jesus all point towards the same thing – a person who studies astrology, is able to do magic and witchcraft (aided by the Satan and the occult).

Apart from these Magi, it is fair to say that these magicians and sorcerers in Scripture (nor elsewhere), do not have a positive influence in the life of a God-loving and God-fearing believer.

**Deuteronomy 18:10-13** states the Lords view on these people.

**READ**

Yet, Daniel under God’s guidance was able to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and as a result he was put **in charge of all the wise men** – the astrologers, magicians and sorcerers **Daniel 2:48**.

Despite being sinful in their nature, God will use men to achieve His purposes – which is just as well, as He can use us in our non-perfect state.

So, God uses this group of non-believing Gentiles as a central part of His message to all people for the next 2,000 years.

(Magi are known to people – wise men / 3 kings / gold, frankincense, myrrh / nativity plays / Christmas cards).

God used these non-believing Gentile and He can use you and me too, even in our non-perfect state.

The Book of Daniel tells us that under God’s favour, his ministry was anointed – no doubt his faith and writings were passed down the generation, until they arrived at the Magi that we know from Matthew’s gospel.

Daniel’s writings prophecy to the exact day Jesus’ death on the cross, so it may not be too surprising that by combining Daniel’s teachings, with the Magi’s study of the stars and God’s gracious guidance, these men were able to discern the time of the Messiah’s birth and Matthew’s Gospel tells us that they came from the east to Jerusalem **Matthew 2:1**.

**SLIDE Matthew 2:4-6**

**4When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: 6“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”**

But we should also look on Matthew’s words with sadness, as there is a great opportunity missed - despite Matthew including a prophecy of the Messiah’s birthplace, written by Micah about 700 years previously.

Why the Magi didn’t know this detail, we can only guess. Possibly, they visited Herod as a courtesy because he was the king.

The sad fact is Herod’s ‘wise men’, the priests and teachers knew exactly where Jesus would be born, yet they didn’t go to find Him, nor did they go to worship. That was left to a group of astrologers from a Pagan land who seek, affirm and worship the ‘King of the Jews.’

We can only wonder what the God-fearing locals in Bethlehem thought about this group when they arrived – under Mosaic law, these people should have been shunned at the very least – maybe that was an element of them not wanting to go to see the Messiah, they didn’t want to associate with these Pagans.

The Father would not allow His Son to go un-praised - if the Jewish ‘wise men’ won’t praise Him, pagan wise men will.

That is the story of Christmas – Jesus the Messiah came for the outcast and those that seek Him will find Him.

God won’t be pushed out – despite human apathy, deceit or even disease, at this Christmas season, God will get the glory and honour He deserves.

Despite a world full of Spiritual darkness, God’s redemptive Christmas message has not been lost – it has not been silenced by secular culture, political correctness, or disappeared under the packaging of materialism.

Praises to the Sovereign creator of this Universe and His Son, our Saviour King, will not be stopped.

We started with Jesus telling His listeners a parable to make the point about being ready and watchful. He could have easily just recounted His birth story.

Matthew expected his readers to catch the striking irony: Gentile astrologers from the east discovered the Jewish King by following a star, but scholars of Israel failed to discern their King though possessing the Scriptures.

These magi were the first gentiles to worship the Jewish Messiah as King and soon the gentiles would be coming to him by the millions and even billions.

Rightfully, **Revelation 7:9-10** can say

**READ**

**After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”**

The message of the magi declares that the Jewish Messiah is Lord of all and that God has provided the way to save *all* who believe.

Do you want to be in that multitude? You just need to be spiritually ready.

**OFFER / PRAY**