**Tony Baker’s last sermon**

*At Holy Trinity Eastbourne Sunday morning 24 September 2023*

*(the 60th anniversary of his entrance into the ministry)*

[Link to audio](https://www.holytrinityeastbourne.org.uk/UserFiles/File/2023_09_24AM_Revd_Tony_Baker_Matthew_24._3_14_Keep_going_.mp3) [Link to video](https://youtu.be/56vCa-hHcUs?t=1247)

**Readings:**

[Jeremiah 13: 13-15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+13%3A+13-15&version=ESV) [Jeremiah 38:5-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+38%3A5-18&version=ESV) [Matthew 24:3-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+24%3A3-14&version=ESV)

Please open your Bibles at Matthew 24. I want to preach from one verse here – and I will pray:

**Opening Prayer:**

‘Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Your unchanging Word. Times change, we change as the years go by, but You and Your Holy Word do not change. So please speak to us, each one now, and help us to hear, to receive, and to be changed by Your Word, because we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.’

I think I need to give you a little, slightly more accurate background as to why we’ve been in this church for the past 20 years. John Cheeseman, Phil’s predecessor, was someone we’d known for quite a long time and he somehow picked up that we were retiring to Eastbourne, and he invited us to come here. And, so I said to John, ‘Will there be opportunities for preaching?’ And John said, ‘Yes.’ So that was twenty years ago, and now is the time to stop. So we came here, and we accepted John’s invitation. And later on he invited us to lead a home group. And we thought about that, and decided that Margaret and I had done many things in ministry, but one thing we’d never actually done was to lead a home group together. And so we accepted John’s invitation, and we continue with the home group and for us certainly it was a very happy and profitable time.

**Sermon:**

Now then, I’d like to ask a question, which you must privately answer. If you are a committed Christian, how are you finding the Christian life? Honestly? Honestly? Oh, you say, it’s wonderful. And so it is. It’s wonderful knowing our Heavenly Father’s mercy and forgiveness because Jesus died for us and everything has changed, We’re now God’s redeemed children and we’re on the way to the glory. I often think of the words of someone called – I think he was called Thomas Valpy – and he was Headmaster of Reading Grammar School for 52 years. Goodness me! I hope he didn’t outstay his welcome. But he said this: ‘My sins deserve eternal death, but Jesus died for me.’ ‘My sins deserve eternal death, but Jesus died for me.’ That is wonderful and that is true.

But the Christian life is not all a bed of roses, is it? Far from it. We have to contend with the world, the flesh – that’s our own fallen nature, which is still around, of course - and the devil himself. Now look at what Jesus says in this passage: chapter 24 of Matthew and verse 13. And He says

***But the one who endures to the end, will be saved*.**

*But the one who endures to the end, will be saved*. Now I want us to focus on that particular verse. Now He’s talking about the end times, and do you realise that the end times are right from the coming of Jesus to His second coming? Those are all the end times, from the first coming until the second. And it’s been of course 2,000 years since Jesus was here. But that is as nothing really. That’s the time between Abraham and the coming of the Lord Jesus. So, that marks about sort of half-way mark point really, the coming of the Lord Jesus between Abraham and today.

So let’s work through what Jesus says in this actual verse:

*But the one who endures to the end, will be saved*.

So:

**First: Keep enduring**

I’m not sure – are you? – that we equate the Christian life enough with enduring. Do you think so? What’s your view? That we go soft on the enduring element. And we need, I think, to be thinking much more about enduring. It’s running a marathon. And anyone – did you know this? – that anyone who runs a marathon in less than 3 hours qualifies to be in the front bunch for the London Marathon next time it’s run. But I happened to have picked that up because our grandson-in-law ran a marathon in Sweden – I do not now why he should have run a marathon in Sweden but he did – and he ran it in 2 hours 57 minutes. So he qualifies for the front bunch in the next London Marathon.

And being a Christian, with all its incalculable blessings – and if you’re not yet a committed Christian you should think just what you haven’t got: you face the judgement of God instead of the love of God; you face eternity without Him and not eternity with Him. But it is, for Christians, the need to *run the race with endurance*. That was just so of course for believers in the living God before the Lord Jesus came. Moses, it says in Hebrews, *he endured as seeing him who is invisible*. I chose that reading from Jeremiah 38 because clearly Jeremiah, who was a very faithful prophet, had a very rough ride and God’s people (in name, at any rate) did not want him. That’s why they put him down in this ghastly well without water. Now Paul, if you read in 2 Corinthians the list of things that he went through – floggings and shipwrecks and all manner of things – but he kept going, because he knew who Jesus was and what Jesus had done for him. And Jesus of course Himself, He also knew what it was to endure with the Cross as the prospect ahead. So, listen again to what it says of the Lord Jesus and His endurance in Hebrews chapter 12: *Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*.

So the message for us now, is keep enduring – keep enduring. Seek to follow in the footsteps of Moses or Jeremiah, Paul, and of course, above all, the Lord Jesus Himself. So, keep enduring. Perhaps you’ve just about got to church this morning and you have wondered whether, well, perhaps you won’t keep going in the Christian life, but keep enduring. If you’re a believer, keep enduring.

**Second:** **Keep anticipating**

Keep anticipating. Because our verses here, it says, keep… *to the end* – *to the end* – *keep enduring to the end*.

Now, as far as I know, there’re always at least two exits to a theatre or a concert hall – always two exits – so that everyone can leave at the end of whatever it is. And finally, we’ve got to keep anticipating because there are two exits. There are only two that I know. One is if Jesus comes again – and He may come in our lifetime – or it may be that, as is true with most people, that we exit this life by physical death. You probably know the quip, ‘The death rate is still 100%’. On your way out look at the foundation stone which is in the wall outside the main entrance and exit there. It may test your Latin a little bit, but what it makes clear is that there was obviously great happenings here in I think 1909 when this building was greatly extended. But of all those who rejoiced on that day, there isn’t one left. Hands up if anyone was here for the opening of the large building here in 1909. Oh! How strange! But it’s not strange, because the exit has come for each one. And the end has come through physical death.

I still remember as a teenager being at home, because my Dad was a vicar as well, and it happened I was the only one in the house, and my parents, presumably my sister, who, did I say was here this morning? – she was too little to answer the phone anyway, I expect – so I answered the phone and the voice said, ‘Please tell your father, that we have just lost David’. David was a healthy and committed Christian teenager, but he had just suddenly died through the Asian ‘flu epidemic, which was going round the country in 1956, 57. And he’d just suddenly gone. And of course that was, humanly speaking, shocking news, though he certainly died as a Christian.

But you see we don’t know – keep anticipating to the end. And David was ready to go, I’m quite sure, because he was already a believer. And I’ll tell you what happened. He had an elder brother called Brian, who as a result of his younger brother’s death, became a Christian, and indeed became a Christian minister.

So we in the right way, need to keep anticipating our exit. Keep enduring, keep anticipating, to the end, because, well, we don’t know how or when, but keep anticipating. And for the Christian, however we leave this world, it’s finally such good news because we’re *with Christ, which is far better*.

**And third: Keep rejoicing**

It says in our text here *will be saved*. They said when this country was slightly more Christian, certainly in a general sense, that committed Christians used to go up to others in the street and say ‘Are you saved?’ Can you imagine that happening now? Not really. But it is a wonderful prospect. And we are saved totally through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is grace alone. We *will be saved*.

Do you know this little story? Most unlikely to have any sign of truth about it. About the three men in a lifeboat and they had a very curious staccato conversation. One looked at the side of the boat from which they’d been rescued in the lifeboat, one looked and said, ‘We have been saved!’ One looked round at the waves surrounding them and he said, ‘We are being saved!’ And the third one in this extraordinary conversation looked to the horizon and there was their rescue boat coming, the lifeboat. Do you see there are three tenses to salvation? And if we’re Christians we have been saved, through what God has done for us in Christ, we are being saved at this moment, and we shall be saved when we see Jesus.

So I think all I want to say now, is keep enduring, keep anticipating, and keep rejoicing, because *he who endures to the end will be saved*. And what will salvation in its fullness mean? But it begins with our enduring now. I don’t usually speak about anyone who’s been, with whose life we’ve been involved, but this is going back a long time, and in one church where we were serving a brother and a sister both became Christians, or they both professed faith. It was interesting because, particularly interesting and remarkable, because both were Jewish. Anyway they both definitely professed faith and I baptised both of them. And then I imagine it was quite soon after that that we moved to another church. Years later I met each one on separate occasions. And one said to me, of her Christian faith, ‘It didn’t work for me.’ And she’d given it up altogether. ‘It didn’t work for me.’ I wonder what she was expecting being a Christian and living a Christian life would be all about. ‘It didn’t work for me.’ But then we met her brother and he was really pressing on as a Christian. And he and his committed Christian wife were very active in Christian work and he was clearly serving the Lord in a responsible job, and he knew what it was really to be converted and I doubt whether that was true of the other one.

**So, keep enduring, keep anticipating, and keep rejoicing, for he *who endures to the end will be saved*.**

**Let’s pray:**

‘Heavenly Father we pray that You’ll speak your Word into our minds and hearts and lives today. And we ask that Your Holy Spirit will bring it home and enable us to live lives that are marked by these three challenges that the Lord Jesus gives us in this one sentence, that we must endure to the end and then know salvation in its fullness. And we pray these things now in Jesus’ name. Amen.’