

When Christ Returns
Mark 13:24-37 (10/25/15)

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On October 30, 1961, Russia dropped a 27-ton hydrogen bomb above the Arctic Circle. It was the largest bomb ever detonated on planet earth, equal to 11,000 Olympic swimming pools full of dynamite exploding at one time. It measured 27 feet long and almost seven feet across. It was 1400 times more powerful than the two bombs we dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima combined. The fireball was five miles in diameter and visible 620 miles away. The mushroom cloud ascended 40 miles high, seven times the height of Mt. Everest. The heat from the explosion could have caused third-degree burns 60 miles from ground zero. Its shock waves traveled three times around the earth. The Russians called it "tsar bomba."

This morning we're going to look at something that will have far greater impact on this world than the "tsar bomba" and will be visible around this entire globe. It's called the second coming of Jesus Christ, and let me tell you, it will be an unparalleled event in a display of earth shaking power and heavenly glory! It will bring to a screeching halt this day of man, when sin and Satan and arrogance and pride and godlessness are running rife throughout the planet.

We need a quick review from last week. Remember that 70th week of Daniel which is still future to right now. In Mark 13 Christ is informing us about that seven-year period, in particular the last half, or that 3 ½ year point when the Anti-Christ will recover from a fatal wound and will take his place in the temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God. Paul describes this in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, "Who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." It is at the middle point of the seven-year period when the Anti-Christ begins his global reign of terror, requiring universal registration to buy and sell, and going after every one who names the name of Christ, trying to exterminate them from the earth. His Secretary of State, the False Prophet, is right there with him doing all kinds of signs and wonders, even making fire come down out of heaven (see Revelation 13).

Now in Mark 13:24 we come to the end of this seven-year period. When earth is at its blackest, most godless, most brutal, most horrendous phase, and the whole world is a holocaust for God's people, Christ assures us of that He is coming, and what a coming that will be! Totally unlike His first coming! He came the first time as the Savior; now He is coming as the judge, in flaming fire, dealing out vengeance on all who reject Him (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). What happens when Christ returns?

The world will see the entire heavens shake and dim to signal Christ's return – v. 24-25

24 But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, 25 AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.

"In those days" means days immediately after that great tribulation which Christ told us about in verse 19, a global, unprecedented tribulation, the darkest hour in earth's history. Satan will know his time is short. Revelation 12:12-13, "Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." The Anti-Christ, driven full speed ahead by that heinous dragon Satan, is trying to purge the world of any trace of God. This Anti-Christ is Satan's last effort to get universal worship.

But now God intervenes. The day of man is at an end. God has allowed the history of this rebellious planet to continue now for over 6000 years without directly intervening, but "in those days" man's godless party will be over.

What happens? There will be these unmistakable signs in the heavens. There will be an astronomical blackout. These are not blood moon guesses. This will be a lunar and solar eclipse all at once, with asteroids smashing into the earth, with unprecedented celestial disturbances – a great shaking.

This is the final Day of the Lord, prophesied over and over in the prophets. Let's listen to Isaiah 13:6-11. *6 Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. 7 Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. 8 They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; They will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. 9 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. 10 For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. 11 Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.*

And this in Isaiah 2:19-21. *19 Men will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble. 20 In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, 21 In order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble.*

We read the same thing in Revelation 6:12-17. *12 I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14 The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

Did you know you can buy a survival condo for several million dollars to go underground and escape whatever coming apocalypse or nuclear explosion we face? Old missile silos in Kansas 170 feet deep are being renovated into all the comforts of plush living arrangements for the very wealthy. There are units being prepared in Indiana and other places in Eastern Europe. Some guarantee at least one year's worth of survival capacity, others five years. Their cost is in the millions.

But no survival bunker will hide you from God! 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 says He will come suddenly, unexpectedly, and inescapably. There will be no place to hide. Christ will fetch out every person on earth. And every rejecter of Christ will have to kneel before Him, acknowledging Him as Lord (Philippians 2:10-11)!



The world will see Christ Himself descend through the heavens to earth in a blaze of unprecedented power and glory – v. 26

Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.

This is just plain awesome in every sense of that word. Who are “they”? The entire world! Everyone living at the end of the seven-year tribulation period will see Him. They will see Him coming from outer space, not instantly like at the rapture, but slowly arriving. I am picturing this pinpoint of brilliant light picked up by earth way out there, coming through the solar system, getting larger and brighter and closer and as this ball of brilliance approaches. The sun and moon and stars fade in comparison and everything starts to shake. The sun dims in the blaze of this brilliant light – this is Christ returning. And He comes closer and enters earth’s atmosphere in the clouds, and He is coming with great, overwhelming, unspeakable, creation quaking power, utter and total unrivaled power, with the greatest display of His glory ever! Oh, what a time that will be! And He won’t be alone!

Let’s turn back to Revelation 19:11-21 just to feed our faith and picture all of this.

Verse 11 – Here He comes in triumphant glory to judge and destroy all His enemies.

Verse 12 – He comes in pure flaming holiness and universal sovereignty.

Verse 13 – He will execute all His enemies and all will know He is God’s revelation to us.

Verse 14 – He will come with this vast heavenly escort of angels and His people.

Verse 15 – He will come in pure justice now, bringing all evil and sin to an end.

Verse 16 – He will come to rule this world like it is supposed to be ruled.

Verse 17-18 – He will come to make war.

Verse 19 – He will return to totally demolish the Anti-Christ armies of this world. Revelation 17:14 indicates all the armies will knowingly gather to fight against Him, perhaps pointing their weapons into the sky to keep Him from coming. But their attempt is totally futile.

Verse 20 – He will personally throw these two deceivers into the lake of fire.

Verse 21 – He returns, not as a meek and mild babe in a manger, not to wear a crown of thorns, not to be spit upon, hit, punched, mocked, flogged, and crucified. No, He returns this time to bring this day of man to an end.

All rebellion, all fist-waving against God, all false religion, all atheism, all self-deification, all arrogance and pride, all hatred toward God will be finally judged when Christ returns. Think of the history of men who would be gods, Alexander the Great, Peter the Great, Napoleon, Stalin (the man of steel), Hitler, and many other wicked tyrants who have ordered the execution of untold numbers of even their own people in history. Think of America today, where secularism is trying hard to scrub God and the Bible and prayer and Christianity out of the public place. This world is united in one thing – to get rid of God. “We’ll not have this man rule over us,” they cried when He came the first time. But now it all ends as Christ comes back in His mighty power and blazing glory and brings all this to an end.

And then, as Zechariah 14:9 says, “And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one!” Oh, don’t you love that! To see this world ruled over by none other than Jesus Christ, who created it all in the first place?

Christ’s angelic escort will gather all His people from every part of the universe – v. 27

And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

Christ does not come alone. I think all the angels will want to come with Him. Their greatest delight is to do His will. They love Christ and want to be right there beside Him. And they have the privilege of going out all over the world and gathering all Christ’s elect! What a great word! In the darkest hour, to remember that God has chosen you to be His child is great comfort. These angels don’t go out gathering religious people or people of faith or nominal Christians. Whom do they gather? Those who truly belong to Christ. And they will gather them from every inch of God’s universe. No believer one will lose out.

These elect specifically include all the Gentile and Jewish believers who survive the horrors of the tribulation period. They will look on Him whom they have pierced. Notice, Christ knows exactly where we are and what we’re going through and cares for us, even though for a time we go through severe trials. But nothing can separate believers from the love of Christ. On the other hand, none of His enemies will escape Him either! When He returns no survival bunker will shield you from His judgment. And when He

returns, it will be too late for those who rejected Him up to that point. The door to salvation will be shut at His second coming!

The world will know Christ has kept His promise of His return – vv. 28-31

28 Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

The fig tree is not symbolic of Israel in this story. It's simply an illustration. The Mount of Olives was full of fig trees, and since it's spring time, the time of the Passover, Jesus probably pointed to a budding fig tree and said, "Just like these fig trees budding out, when all this stuff is happening, this Abomination of Desolation and all the horrors of the great tribulation, for that future generation living at that time, they can be assured Christ is on His way. He's at the door. Hang on. Don't be deceived by the Anti-Christ and all his signs and wonders. Your entire world may seem to be crumbling, but Christ will keep His Word. He's right at the door. Count on it! Let's be strong. If they kill us, He'll resurrect us. Don't compromise. Don't deny Him. Don't bow down to the world system!

The world has been put on notice – Be on the alert! – vv. 32-37

32 But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 33 Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. 34 It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35 Therefore, be on the alert--for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning-- 36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 "What I say to you I say to all, "Be on the alert!"

For us it seems the fig tree is budding, doesn't it? This world is more rapture ready than ever. But neither you nor I know the future! I bought gas the other day when I still had close to half a tank because it was like \$2.26, figuring I'd get it before it went up. The next morning it was \$2.19. I don't know what a day is going to bring forth.

Who knows when Jesus is coming, either at the rapture or His second coming to earth? What does He say about setting dates? How many times does He have to tell us? Verse 32 – "No one," and verse 35, "You do not know!" No one! So let's not be writing books about Jesus coming back on October 25, 2022. Kent Hughes warns, "Anyone who says he knows the date of Christ's return borders on blasphemy."

Here's what we need to do, and if you read verse 37, you see Jesus isn't just talking to His disciples. He's talking to every one of His elect, including this future generation alive during the Tribulation period. Don't fall asleep at the wheel! Be awake! Be vigilant and busy about serving our Lord with one eye on our work and the other eye on the sky, living with that burning hope in seeing Christ face to face! Notice that phrase in verse 34, "to each one his task." You have a task to do in the body of Christ. Every day is the day to serve the Lord until His comes! Be on the alert! Be on FULL ALERT! He may come today. Are you ready?

I want to end with a clear summary of our understanding of the end times.

THE RAPTURE - The next event will be the rapture of the church. Christ will swoop into earth's atmosphere and snatch up all dead and living believers to take us back to heaven with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

THE TRIBULATION Daniel's 70th week of seven years of unprecedented tribulation will immediately follow the rapture of the church (Revelation 6-19).

THE SECOND COMING Christ will return to earth to destroy all His enemies and gather all His people (Zechariah 14; Revelation 19).

THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM Christ will set up the 1000-year kingdom on earth (Revelation 20:1-6).

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT At the end of the 1000 years Christ will bring every lost person to judgment and they will be thrown into the lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:7-15).

THE ETERNAL STATE The universe will be cleansed of all sin, we will enter into the eternal state, the glory of Christ will fill the heavenly city which will be on earth, and we will be with our God forever and ever in fullness of joy and incredible pleasures forever and ever (Revelation 21-22).