

The End of the World

Luke Series #54

Luke 21:25-38

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Please open your Bible to Luke 21. We have seen that Jesus gave this prophetic discourse—the Olivet Discourse. It was the final week and He had two horizons in view as He spoke these words. There was the immediate horizon of what was going to happen in the next few decades, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD, all of which took place just as our Lord predicted.

Your Redemption is Drawing Near

We now turn to Luke 21:25 and the gaze shifts to the more distant horizon: the end of the world and the Second Coming of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Jesus said that as these events draw near, there would be two very diverse reactions. We are going to see this at the end of the sermon. There will be a shout of joy and a cry of anguish at the coming of Christ.

Jesus said the same in verse 26: There will be people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming to the world, as the signs of the end draw nearer and nearer. However, at the same time, Jesus said that for His people this would be a time of great joy. He told us how we should respond to the news of His coming at the end of the world.

In verse 28, as we see the signs of the end, which have really been taking place for 2,000 years now, Jesus says, *“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* Focus on that verse for a moment. *“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

Who would find good news in those words? I think of people like the Chilean miners in 2010. There were 33 miners trapped underneath the ground for 69 days. They were 2,050 feet beneath the surface of the earth, which is about the height of one and a half Empire State Buildings. They were trapped there and their fate seemed to be sealed. What they had dreaded their whole career had come upon them. They could cry out but it wouldn't help. They could bang against the wall but it would do no good. All their strength was helplessness. These men

knew that up there above the earth people were moving about, living their lives. Their wives and children were crying but the way to get to them was blocked. It was a time of agony, waiting for death.

What was it like for them when they finally heard a faint sound—maybe a hammer above or a breaking up of stone? Finally, voices were far away, calling in the dark as the blows got harder and harder and seconds seemed like hours. Communication was finally established and a friendly voice called out, “Help is on the way!” When these things begin to take place—when the earth is shaken and there is great distress, perplexity and roaring of sea and waves—Jesus says, *“Straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

I think of prisoners of war and how long they have borne the shame of their bondage. Its hard labor wears them down until they’re emaciated. They can’t sleep at night; they have no energy left during the day. They drag themselves wearily through their existence. They’ve tried every possible way to escape, only to be caught and brought into harsher conditions than they knew before. Every sigh, every tear goes unheeded. Their chains dig deeper and deeper into their wounds. Suddenly they hear, off in the distance, the sound of airplanes. Bombs are dropping. Shots are being fired. It means the liberators are coming. When these things begin to take place, Jesus says, *“Straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

I think of the week we spent at Northwestern Hospital back in February 2010, on a floor where patients were quarantined as they underwent transplants and infusions. For some of them, weeks turned into months of interminable pain. What would it be like for one of those patients for whom every day seems like a living death to see a doctor come in beaming with confidence and hear the words, “Next week, you will be released because your terminal illness has been healed”? When these things begin to take place, Jesus says, *“Straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

Redemption means freedom, deliverance and release from bondage that’s obtained through the payment of a price. It means to be no longer trapped and no longer in prison. It means to be no longer under the guilt and shame of sin. For whom are these words written? Who is really being addressed in this text, *“Straighten up and raise your heads...”*? For whom are the end of the world and the coming of Christ good news?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “These words are for people who know they are not free in themselves.” These are words for people who know they are enslaved and bound, that a power controls them to which they must pay service. They are for people who are buried alive like prisoners, who long constantly for freedom and real deliverance. That’s for whom these words

were written. They are not directed toward the indifferent or to people who are unimpressed by the guilt and weight of sin. These words are not for the satisfied and content in this world; these are words for people who hunger at first for a better world—for a new world, a world of freedom and deliverance.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ have been redeemed. We've been set free from bondage to sin and captivity to Satan, but we still live in a world that is groaning for the fullness of the benefits of our redemption. We still live in bodies that are tormented by indwelling sin and we groan with all creation, waiting for the fullness of our redemption to break through. When we hear of the end of the world, we say, "That's good news." When we hear of a Savior Who is coming to bring about a new heaven and new earth, we say, "Oh, yes, we straighten up and raise our heads at that prospect because our redemption is drawing near."

Christians are people for whom there is no hope in this world that is passing away. Our only hope is in Jesus Christ. Our lives are characterized like the Apostle Peter, who was waiting for and hastening the coming of the Day of God. He knew the heavens would be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies would melt as they burn. However, Peter said, "According to His promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

That's what characterizes God's people. We're not settled in this world. We are not putting our hopes in this life. We're waiting for a new world, like pilgrims going on a journey to the heavenly city. For us, the nearer we approach the end of this world, the nearer our redemption. We look forward to it.

The End of the World

That's strange in our society. People scoff at the idea of the end of the world. If you talk about it, people will think you're weird. I asked Siri on my iPhone, "When will the world end?" She gave me a variety of answers. It almost sounded like she had a mocking tone when she said, "Hmm, David. Let me see. It looks like the answer is in about five billion years." Or she said, "As long as you keep me charged, we should be just fine."

Yet, in a world that sneers and mocks at the idea of the world ending, we keep making apocalyptic movies. Year after year, they come out. Hollywood is continually making movies like World War Z because people are concerned about how history will end. There is more than ample evidence that what Jesus said in verse 26 is already happening. People are fainting with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world. Many people think it's the job of the government or those who are smart to somehow stop this world from coming to an end. We're

afraid, whether it's through global warming, nuclear proliferation, AIDS or any number of dire scenarios.

There is gnawing underneath the conscience of our worldly optimism—this nagging dread. What if this world is passing away? What if things as we know it will come to an end? It's a question people don't want to face. However, why is it when you read the Bible it seems like the prophets were always talking about the end of the world? Why is that? Well, it's because they were. The prophets talked about this a lot.

Listen to Joel 2:30-31. He said, *“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”*

Isaiah 10:13 says, *“For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.”*

Haggai said that God would shake the heavens, the earth, the sea and the dry land. Daniel, in chapter seven of his prophecy, spoke of what will follow that shaking. In verses 13 through 14, he said:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

That is what believers hope in—not this world but this indestructible kingdom. It's not just the prophets of the Old Testament who preached these things. Jesus did. He proclaimed the end of the world and He taught us that He is going to come again to usher in that indestructible Kingdom. That's what we read here in Luke 21:25-27. As I read these words of Jesus again, listen for the echoes of Joel the prophet. Listen for the echoes of Haggai, Isaiah and Daniel. It's all here in the background as Jesus speaks these words.

Verse 25-27 say,

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

This is fact. This is the future. When He comes, He will come. The question I want to ask you is when He comes, will you be ready to stand before the Son of Man? Will you lift up your heads knowing that your redemption is drawing near or will you be fainting with fear and foreboding? Will you be like the people in the book of Revelation who flee and cry out to the hills and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb? Will that day come upon you suddenly like a trap, as Jesus said it would come on many in verse 34?

What we're going to do is kind of an emergency preparedness drill. It's an opportunity before the end comes for you to assess if you are ready for the end of all things. Are you ready to stand before the Son of Man when He comes? We're going to look at three diagnostic tests that Jesus gives us in this passage, which can determine our preparedness for that great day.

Diagnostic #1: Your Attentiveness to Christ's Word

This is a real test to determine whether you are ready to stand before the Son of Man or not. How attentive are you to Christ's Word? Remember, it was just days before His death. He was in the final week of His life, and what was Jesus doing? He was teaching. I don't know for sure how many days He was doing this, but even at the end of the chapter we see that He was teaching every day in the temple. At night, He would go out to Mount Olivet, and, even after He gave this discourse early in the morning, He returned to the temple. The people came to hear Him. Jesus spent the final week of His life teaching.

I think we pay great attention to some of His teachings, like the Sermon on the Mount or the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but here He was in the final week of His life talking to us about the future. Obviously, this is of vast importance. It is vital that we pay attention to what Jesus said here about the end of all things, because when a man knows he's about to die, he chooses his words carefully; he measures them and does not speak glibly. Jesus spoke very seriously about the end of all things and He said that His words would endure. Look at verse 33, which says, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*"

Jesus said that creation itself is less permanent than His teaching. Jesus' teaching will endure beyond this passing world. His words will not pass away. Who are you trusting to tell you about the future? To whom are you listening? Are you paying attention to Christ's Word?

This is He Whose birth in Bethlehem in a manger was prophesied hundreds of years before His coming, and He came just as it had been foretold. This is He Who said He would die on the cross to ransom many from their sins and then told us that He would also rise from the dead. The stone, the seal and the soldiers could not hold Him in that tomb; He rose from the dead just as He said. This is He Who three and a half decades before Jerusalem's destruction in

70 AD told us that not one stone would be upon another in that temple, that they would all come crashing down. He told us in verses 20-24 about the destruction in Jerusalem, how it would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. This is He Who prophesied those events in advance and they happened just as He said they would.

He told us that He is coming again. Mockers scoff at those words but every word Jesus has spoken comes true. His Word will stand the test of time. Heaven and earth will pass away but not His words.

What is His Word telling us? One thing is that the end is certain. Look at verse 35, which says, *“For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.”* Everyone will experience these events.

Archibald Alexander said, “It is not so certain that we should ever see the sun rise again as it is that we shall see the day of judgment.” It is more certain that you will see the day of judgment than that you will see the sun rise tomorrow morning. That’s the truth.

The end is certain and His Word tells us that the end is near. Jesus told His disciples that we should look at the signs of the times and see how these things are being fulfilled. Look at verses 29-30. The text says, *“And he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.’”*

Aren’t you longing to go outside one of these days and see some buds on those trees? To know that, finally, the winter of 2014 is coming to an end and summer is here. Jesus said, “Look at the signs.”

There are some difficulties in this chapter. Verse 32 is one of those. I wrote [an article](#) in our weekly newsletter, Life Together, to explain what I believe about verse 32. I believe that all the signs of the times that Jesus said would indicate that the end is near happened within the first generation of those who heard Jesus’ words. In verse 32, Jesus said, *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.”*

I think what Jesus was saying is that everything necessary for His return has happened. As Craig Blomberg puts it, “In other words, nothing any longer stands in the way of Christ’s return, but neither does Jesus give any sign by which we may be able to predict the time of His coming.”

If we pay attention to the signs Jesus gives us, our conclusion should be that the coming of the Son of Man is near (verse 27), the redemption of His people is near (verse 28), and the Kingdom of God in its fullness is near (verse 31). The end is near! He is coming soon. That’s

been true for 2,000 years. We are living in the last days. For believers, this is such good news. Jesus is coming soon.

I read a cute illustration from Pastor Chris Brauns, who is the pastor of The Red Brick Church near Rockford, Illinois. He had a picture of this little boy, Jaden, on his blog, and he wrote this:

When Jaden's parents put him to bed on Tuesday night, they told him, "Well, tomorrow, Jaden, you will be five years old." In the middle of the night, Jaden's dad took him to the bathroom and said, "Well, Jaden, now you are five." Jaden replied with awe, "Wow! That was quick!" So it was for his parents. In the blink of an eye, babies are five years old. And so it shall be for us. Life is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Surely, Christ is coming soon. We'll wake up—maybe in the middle of the night—in a moment, in the twinkling, and we'll say with all the wonder of five-year-old Jaden, "Wow! That was quick!" And all eternity, when we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun, we'll have no less days to sing His praise than when it first begun.

His coming is near. If you're not heeding His Word, you are putting yourself in incredible peril.

I was thinking of Governor Chris Christie back in 2012, as Hurricane Sandy was approaching the shores of New Jersey. Governor Christie got out there and was practically shouting at people, getting really earnest, saying, "What is wrong with you people that you would stay here on the shore? Trouble is coming! Get out! Escape for your own safety!"

If we're not heeding the Word of Christ, we are placing ourselves in infinitely greater peril than to stand on the shores waiting for a category five hurricane. Flee from the wrath to come. That's what Jesus and the prophets said. Don't treat His coming judgment lightly. Are you heeding the Word of Christ? Are you attentive to Him? That's the first test of your preparedness for His coming.

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Diagnostic #2: Your Watchfulness over Your Own Heart

Look at verses 34 and 35, in which Jesus said, "*But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.*"

If you take Jesus' Word seriously, you will be vigilant in guarding your own heart because we are in a battle in this world. This world is like a powerful magnet, luring us and

drawing us away from Christ. Jesus said there are things that can weigh down our hearts that hinder our readiness for His coming.

Back in 2000, Kate, our daughter Ruth and I had the opportunity to go on a small airplane over Mount McKinley in Alaska. I'll tell you what, at that little airport where we took off from Talkeetna, you did not want to lie about your weight before you got on that airplane. They made it very clear that there was a weight limit and everything had to be precise. Too much weight on that little plane and it could easily crash.

Jesus was saying, "Don't let your heart be weighed down by dissipation, which is a squandering of money, energy and resources, as you try to build your own little heaven here on earth. Don't squander all your resources in an attempt to gain this world. Don't let the urgent crowd out the important matters of your soul. Don't let the things of this life capture your heart so that all your energy and resources are being dissipated on things that will not last."

Drunkenness, Jesus said, can weigh down your heart. As a church, we don't take the position that Scripture forbids all use of alcohol. That's something that believers must judge in their own conscience before God. I believe the Scriptures teach that wine itself is a gift of God's creation and that it is in itself good, but its abuse is forbidden. Scripture seriously warns against it in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, which says,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

There are a number of sins in that list that Christians would agree with, but this one about alcohol is something of which we must be aware. The pursuit of drunkenness can hinder your readiness for His return. It can endanger your entrance into His Kingdom. There is hope for those who struggle with this sin—for those who struggle with alcohol and alcoholism. However, the Word of God goes on to say, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

This is not a sin to be taken lightly. Drunkenness is not a characteristic of someone who is prepared for Christ's return. Why is that?

I heard a sermon by Pastor John Kimble at Clifton Baptist Church and I thought he put it very well. He said something like this:

Drunkenness feeds and exemplifies a distorted perspective on reality—a godless perspective. It reveals that your hope and trust

and joy are not in the gracious provision of God in Jesus Christ but in the pleasures of this world. Whether we give ourselves to alcohol in order to numb pain or to reduce anxiety or to pursue pleasure, it's false. It's a fleeting peace and a fleeting pleasure and a fleeting joy, and it will bring great trouble into our lives. And most significantly, it's drawing us away from dependence on and trust in Christ alone. Alcohol dulls our vision. It neutralizes our alertness to the supremacy of Christ, and it thwarts our readiness for His return.

It's interesting, insightful and instructive that this is one of the sins that Jesus mentioned that we need to guard ourselves against as we wait for His return. But then He adds to dissipation and drunkenness the cares of this life. These are things which are okay in themselves but begin to take over our hearts and minds—things like food, clothing, houses, jobs, earning a profit and even good relationships and getting care and encouragement from others.

All of these things can consume us so much that we can't see beyond them anymore. We no longer have our gaze fixed on God but on our earthly circumstances. Our hope, dependence, trust and joy gets absorbed into these things so much that the thought of Christ's return seems so vague, rapid and non-compelling. It hardly even factors into our daily priorities. We're hardly even thinking that He is coming soon.

Jesus said, "Watch out! Guard your heart, lest that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. Don't be like the bird that sees that sweet morsel. That's all the bird can see and he goes after it; then the trap is sprung and it's too late."

This world's system is doing all it can to get your eyes off Christ and off His coming and fixated on this world. Jesus said, "Guard your heart against that."

Diagnostic #3: Your Alertness in Prayer

Verse 36 says, "*But stay awake at all times, [how do you do that?] praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place [in great fear and foreboding on the world], and to stand before the Son of Man.*"

Jesus said there is no room for being passive or naïve in this world. There are going to be fierce temptations waging war against your soul. You must fight the good fight of faith. The way you do that is through prayer. Prayer is what keeps you awake. It's like a carbon monoxide detector going off, warning you there's poison in the atmosphere. Don't fall asleep or you'll die. Prayer keeps us awake to the things of God. Our prayerfulness is a great gauge of our readiness. When we cease praying, we drift into a spiritual coma.

One of the reasons we periodically gather for an extended time of prayer as a church family is because we want to ask God to help us guard our hearts against dissipation, drunkenness and the cares of this life. We want to keep our gaze fixed and our eyes lifted up to the One Who is coming, looking forward to our redemption drawing near.

I see good news in this word from Jesus in verse 36. I see grace here. Stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape. Why? Because prayer is looking away from ourselves to the only One Who is able to make us ready to stand before the Son of Man. Prayer is saying, "I can't be ready in myself. I need You to keep me, God, and to clothe me, so that, dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless, I can stand before the Son of Man when He comes to gain His everlasting throne."

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