

The Son of Man Coming

Luke 21:1-38

Key Verse: 21:27

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

In this passage, Luke, the evangelist and historian, presents Jesus’ prophetic declaration of future events, climaxing in his coming again. Jesus’ coming again is the great event that all of human history is moving toward. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The end comes when Jesus Christ returns in power and great glory as King and Judge. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Jesus’ coming again is the great hope of all believers. Let’s accept this hope in our hearts. And let’s learn how to live in light of this great hope.

Let’s study this passage in three parts. In verses 1-4, Jesus honors the offering of a poor widow. In verses 5-24, Jesus foretells the end of Jerusalem. In verses 25-38 Jesus speaks of the universal event of his coming again.

I. Jesus honors a widow's offering (1-4)

As chapter 21 begins, Jesus was still in the temple. Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. According to history, wealthy diaspora Jews were sending generous gifts to finance the temple’s reconstruction, which was begun by King Herod. Herod wanted to ingratiate himself to the Jews, and also build a memorial to his achievements. So he himself contributed to the temple a magnificent golden vine with grape clusters as tall as a man. Jewish leaders overlooked the inherent danger of compromise with Herod and willingly participated. Temple construction took more than 80 years, from 19 B.C. to 63 A.D. The number of workers reached 10,000. This great national building project seemed to have captured the minds and hearts of the people of Israel. Generous donors may have been recognized by putting their names and offering amounts on commemorative plaques and posting them in a prominent place. They may have listed first class givers (\$10,000 or more), second class givers (\$5,000 or more), etc. To many, these generous gifts were impressive. But Jesus saw more than that.

Look at verse 2. Jesus **“also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.”** These thin coins were like pennies; it was not enough money for one temple worker to buy a hearty lunch. Yet Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, this**

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poor widow has put in more than all the others.” Why was it so? Jesus went on, **“All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on”** (4). This tells us how Jesus evaluates offerings. Jesus does not see just the amount, but how much we sacrifice. Jesus measures the willingness and generosity of our hearts. If rich people give large offerings without feeling the pain of sacrifice, it is not noteworthy. But the widow’s comparatively small offering moved Jesus’ heart. It was because she sacrificed everything. She showed that she loved God more than money. Her offering was an act of worship. Moreover, it was all she had to live on. This shows that she did not calculate about her future; she trusted God with her life. Furthermore, she did not compare herself with those who gave more, and feel inferior. She gave to God as an act of personal faith. Finally, she did not become discouraged because religious leaders were corrupted, and so stop giving. She gave without reservation as a matter of faithfulness to God.

We learn two things here. **First, we learn from the widow how to offer to God in a way that pleases Jesus.** There is a saying, “Give until it hurts; then give a little more.” Such acts of sacrifice, love and faith please Jesus. **Second, we learn from Jesus how to recognize true sacrifice for God.** We should not be overly impressed by the large offerings of the rich. Nor should we take lightly the genuine sacrifice of the poor. We should learn to see the spirit and heart of the giver from God’s point of view. Then we can maintain in our community a spirit of giving that pleases Jesus.

II. Jesus prophesies Jerusalem's fall (5-24)

Jesus’ prophetic words in this passage echo those in Matthew and Mark. Yet, they are also quite distinct. Luke focuses more on the destruction of Jerusalem--a recurring theme in his gospel (13:34-35; 19:41-44).

Look at verse 5. **“Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God.”** It seems that the disciples were not listening to Jesus. He taught repeatedly how to see spiritual realities, but they were fascinated by the glittering appearance of the temple and lost their minds. The temple was indeed impressive. Its massive stones were blue-white marble. Interior stones weighed five tons while corner stones weighed tens of tons. It was covered by plates of gold. When reflecting the sunlight, it was so dazzling that it blinded the eyes. It was so magnificent that it seemed to last forever.

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But Jesus said, **“As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down”** (6). Jesus declared complete destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. It was a shocking prophecy to the disciples. Jesus wanted to awaken them from fascination with human culture so they could see the world from God’s point of view. We can learn a lesson here. We should not lose our minds to human culture. It seems so impressive: the Roman Coliseum, the Great Wall of China, the Koln Dome, the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower, the Willis Tower, the International Space Station, new airplanes, high speed trains, computers, satellites, Blackberries, I-phones, and the Internet. But we must know that these things will all perish in the course of time. To trust in them is to build on a foundation that will crumble sooner or later. We must guard our hearts from fascination with human culture.

When the disciples heard Jesus’ words, they knew he was speaking the truth. They accepted his prophecy. This gave rise to two questions in their hearts: **“When will these things happen?”** and **“What will be the sign?”** Jesus answered their questions, but not directly. Rather, Jesus gave a lengthy discourse summarizing remaining human history for them. Jesus’ primary concern was not to satisfy their curiosity, but to equip them spiritually for the times to come. We find four key teachings of Jesus in verses 8-24.

First, watch out that you are not deceived (8). Look at verse 8. **“He replied: ‘Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am he,” and, “The time is near.” Do not follow them.’”** Jesus warned of false messiahs who would arise. When people are oppressed and suffering, they are vulnerable. Then false messiahs promise victory, peace and salvation, enticing them to follow. But in the end these false messiahs deliver defeat and destruction. Historically, there had been men like Theudas and Judas the Galilean who had led people astray (Ac 5:35-37). In our times false messiahs may include money, romantic love, and human glory. Those who seem to attain these things become greatly admired, such as rock stars, sports stars and movie stars. But in the end they all become shooting stars who fizzle and fade away. Some false messiahs speak in Christian language, promising their followers a free and easy life without suffering. Others gain followers by claiming to know the date of Jesus’ coming again. They steal people’s minds by inserting current events into Bible prophecies; then they empty their bank accounts. These kinds of people are all liars. **Our only true Messiah is Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins and rose again from the dead. Jesus forgives us, cleanses us, and gives us eternal life in the**

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kingdom of God. Jesus taught us to follow him by denying ourselves, taking up our crosses and living for his purpose. We must watch out for false messiahs. We must follow our true Messiah Jesus every day by prayerfully listening to his words.

Second, do not be frightened (9-11). Look at verse 9. **“When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”** Preceding the fall of Jerusalem, there were many rumors of wars and revolutions. On a global scale, nations and kingdoms were in conflict. There were earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and many fearful events. Jesus told his people not to be frightened by such things. No matter how awful the world may seem we must not let fear rule our hearts. The words **“...but the end will not come right away”** tell us that all these things are in God’s hands. Though the world seems to get out of control, it is not. God is in control. When we put our faith in God, he gives us peace in the times of trouble. He enables us to endure hardship patiently.

Third, be Jesus’ witnesses in times of persecution (12-19). Look at verse 12. **“But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.”** This happened as recorded in the book of Acts, to Peter, James, John and Paul. When we examine why they were persecuted, it was because of Jesus’ name. Since religious and political leaders hated Jesus and his kingdom, they persecuted his servants. Yet this, too, is in the hand of God. It results in Jesus’ people being witnesses to them (13). Jesus works through persecution to spread the gospel. His servants must discern his purpose and decide to be his witnesses (14).

Jesus promises to give words and wisdom that none of the adversaries can resist or contradict (15). A good example is Stephen. He was a servant in the early church who was full of the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the gospel. Hellenistic Jews plotted against him. He had to stand before the hate-filled Sanhedrin all alone. Yet, when he spoke, the Spirit gave him words and wisdom, and he delivered a piercing message. The Sanhedrin members were so furious that they took him out and stoned him. As he was dying, Stephen looked up to heaven, saw Jesus at the right hand of God, and prayed, **“Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit,”** and, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them”** (Ac 7:55-60). In this way, Stephen witnessed to Christ. The Greek word for witness can also be translated “martyr.” Stephen’s martyrdom contributed to the conversion of an enemy Saul, who would later preach the gospel to the world. We should not have a victim’s mind in times of

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persecution. When we depend on Jesus, he gives us words and wisdom. Jesus enables us to win the victory over any adversary for his glory and salvation purpose.

The most difficult persecution may be that of family and close friends. Though loved and trusted, they betray Christians to save themselves. In the final analysis, each person must decide to be for Jesus or against Jesus. And this decision determines his or her deepest loyalty. Even family members will be divided based on how they see Jesus. Everyone who is against Jesus will hate Jesus' people. Some will even put Jesus' people to death. Yet Jesus said in verse 18, **"But not a hair of your head will perish."** Those who give their lives for Christ will enter eternal life at the moment their bodies die, just as Stephen did. Jesus boldly told us, **"By standing firm you will gain life"** (19).

Fourth, recognize God's punishment and flee from it (20-24). In these verses Jesus speaks very specifically about Jerusalem. It was to warn his people of the coming judgment so they could flee from it. Foreign armies would surround Jerusalem. This would be the sign that terrible and complete destruction was near. The temple would be demolished, making Jerusalem desolate. All of her inhabitants would either be killed or taken prisoner. The city would be given over to the Gentiles and the people of Israel would be dispersed among the nations. This was God's punishment upon the city and the nation in fulfillment of Scripture. This was literally fulfilled. In A.D. 70, Roman General Titus invaded the city. He demolished the temple, just seven years after it was finished, leaving no stone on another. Practically, it was to get gold out from between the stones. Spiritually, it fulfilled Jesus' prophecy precisely. The Roman army killed over one million people and took another 100,000 captive. History says that no Christians went through this terrible punishment. They heeded Jesus' warning and fled the city.

The destruction of Jerusalem and Israel is a warning to us. If they were punished so severely for their sins, any other city or nation can be also. Since the founding of America by godly people, she has enjoyed God's favor. Yet during the last several decades, there has been a decline of morality that is shocking. The sexual revolution begun in the late 1960's was largely about fornication. Since then, the moral standard has degenerated until gross immorality is now accepted in the name of civil liberties. Since 1973, some fifty million unborn babies have been killed, largely for the convenience of the sexually promiscuous. At present, 24 million children come from homes broken by divorce. Dr. Billy Graham said, "If God does not judge America, he must apologize to the people of Sodom and

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Gomorrah.” This nation, which has long enjoyed God’s favor, is in danger. We should recognize that God’s judgment will come if our nation does not repent. It is time for us to flee in a spiritual sense, by living a pure life and affirming our citizenship in heaven.

The judgment of Jerusalem served God’s redemptive purpose (24). It liberated Christianity from the bonds of Judaism. Gentile nations could embrace and live out gospel faith in forms suited to their own cultures. The Gentiles have enjoyed God’s favor for 2,000 years. This time of favor will end according to God’s schedule. In this last part, Jesus tells what happens next.

III. Jesus comes again in power and great glory (25-38)

This last section is more universal in nature and worldwide in scope. It first tells us what the world will be like before Jesus comes again. Look at verses 25-26. **“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”** If the sun, moon or stars are shifted just a little, the earth is devastated. For example, some say that the use of aerosol cans has harmed the earth’s ozone layer. Now, as a result, ultraviolet rays have a stronger effect on the earth. This has led to global warming and the melting of polar ice caps. Men cannot solve these kinds of problems. They become helpless and very anxious. However, we can know that just as the night is darkest right before dawn, so the world seems most hopeless right before the most glorious event in human history.

Look at verse 27. **“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”** The Son of Man is Jesus Christ. This brings to mind the fulfillment of prophecy. Daniel 7:13,14 says, **“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”** Jesus is the Son of Man. He will return to this world as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will establish a new Jerusalem. Revelation 21:2-4 say, **“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he**

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will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” It is the end of all evil and unrighteousness, and the day of final victory for God's children. Jesus said, **“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”** (28).

Though there are many trials and tribulations that Christians will go through in this world, our great comfort and hope is this: Jesus gives final victory when he comes again. Jesus will wipe every tear from our eyes and crown us with everlasting glory. This is such good news! In order to help us believe, Jesus gives us assurance and warnings in the rest of this passage.

Jesus assures us through the fulfillment of the signs. Once we have been enlightened by Jesus' teachings, our eyes open to the true spiritual meaning of the events in our world. Dreadful events do not frighten us. Rather, we see how God is working to fulfill his good will. Just as sprouting leaves on a fig tree tell us that summer is near, so the fulfillment of these signs tells us that the kingdom of God is near.

Jesus assures us further by reminding us of the integrity of his words. Look at verses 32-33. **“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”** Jesus is in very nature God, who made the heavens and the earth by his word. The fulfillment of Jesus' word is more certain than the ground we walk on or the air we breathe. Because Jesus promised to come and bring final victory, we can be sure of it.

Jesus also gave us warnings. Look at verse 34. **“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”** People who don't believe in Jesus' promise cannot face the distressing terror of this world. So they get drunk and use drugs and go to parties and play video games endlessly in order to cope. While they are escaping reality in such a way, they will be caught like an animal in a trap. Jesus' people must be careful not to fall into that kind of escapism. What then can we do? Look at verse 36. **“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”** We should pray for our escape.

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We should also pray to be able to stand. When we pray, God will strengthen us to stand firm to the end.

Jesus spent his last days teaching the word of God in the temple from early morning, and his nights in personal prayer on the Mount of Olives. This is the best way to endure hard trials and prepare for his coming again. May God bless each of us to hold the hope of Jesus' coming in our hearts and to live sacrificial lives as his witnesses until he returns in power and great glory.