

THE SON OF MAN IS 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 the last passage Jesus met the Sadducees, who said there is no resurrection. They were highly educated and the privileged elite of the society. Yet when they had no resurrection faith, they were slaves of the thought of death. Jesus taught them that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive. When we believe in the living God, he gives us eternal life. Those who believe in Christ will never die. Though their physical bodies perish, their souls live forever in God. At the resurrection, they will receive glorious spiritual bodies and be like the angels. They will be like Jesus. When we have this hope in our hearts, God gives us victory over the power of death and all the elements of death, such as sorrow, fear and despair. May God help us to live by resurrection faith.

In today's passage Jesus tells his disciples what would happen in the future. It was most important for them to know where history is going. Some people say, “History is going nowhere.” Others say, “What is history?” But our God is the God of history. We must know that history is moving forward, toward the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in power and great glory. Jesus gives us this promise to encourage us that final victory is ours in him. When we know this, we can confront the turbulent world with peace and confidence. May God plant the promise of the Second Coming of Jesus in our hearts.

First, Jesus honors a poor widow's offering (1-4)

Jesus was teaching the word of God in the temple to the Jewish religious leaders. Then Jesus looked up. Like everyone else, Jesus saw the rich putting their offerings into the temple treasury. They announced their giving with trumpets and made a grand display as they placed large amounts into the offering box. Many must have said, “Ooh,” and “Ahh” in admiration. But Jesus did not. Instead, Jesus noticed something that all others might have overlooked. It was a poor widow putting in two very small copper coins. It was just a few cents. Yet Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the others” (3). How could it be? Jesus explained, “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). Here we learn that Jesus is not impressed with outward appearances. Jesus sees the heart. Jesus understood how difficult it was for this poor widow to put in her two small copper coins. In doing so, she gave everything she had to God. She expressed her wholehearted love for God. She expressed her faith in God. To Jesus, her offering was number one, the best. Jesus teaches us a most important spiritual lesson. No matter what situation we may be in, we can please Jesus when we give our hearts to him. Jesus is not pleased with mere money. Jesus is pleased by those who give their hearts to him.

Second, signs of the end of the age (5-19).

After hearing Jesus' words about the widow, his disciples should have gained spiritual insight to see man and the world from God's point of view. However, they were still vulnerable to the glittering things of the world. Some of them began remarking about the Jerusalem temple. The temple was adorned with beautiful, gold-plated stones, and gifts dedicated to God. It was the apex of cultural achievement of the time and it was fascinating to behold. The disciples were enamored. Soon, they felt ashamed of their country attire and disheveled impression, compared to the well-groomed temple priests in their flowing robes. They were like teenage boys who suddenly felt that only they did not have Nike gym shoes. The influence of materialism took away truth, and the words of Jesus vanished from their hearts. Actually, Jesus called them to be spiritual leaders who would influence the world to such a degree that the trend of world history would be changed, and human civilization and culture set on right foundations. But for a moment, they were overwhelmed by the sight of the Jerusalem temple.

Jesus understood his disciples. But Jesus wanted them to have spiritual insight to see through human culture. So he told them, “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). The magnificent temple would not last long. It had become a denizen of evildoers under the influence of greedy and arrogant religious leaders. Soon it would be destroyed. Its destruction would be so complete that not one stone would be left on another. In light of gospel history, churches that become too rich are in the same danger as the Jerusalem temple. In the Middle Ages, many poor people gave sacrificially to churches until

they were filled with gold. But when the leaders became corrupted, pagan invaders came and plundered them completely.

The Jerusalem temple had been the focal point of Jewish life and culture. It was thought to be the house of God. When Jesus foretold its destruction, the disciples were really surprised. Still, they accepted Jesus' words. Then they asked, "Teacher, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" (7) Jesus did not give them a simple answer. Rather, Jesus taught them the signs of the end of the age and the climax of human history. Jesus gives several important warnings and instructions in verses 8-19.

In the first place, watch out for false messiahs (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.'" There was a great danger for the vulnerable disciples to be deceived by those falsely claiming to be the Messiah. False messiahs promise salvation but they cannot deliver it. False messiahs have appealed to men down through the generations and have led many to destruction. Of course, false messiahs can be specific people who claim to be the Messiah, like John Lennon, who said the Beatles were bigger than Jesus. False messiahs can also be ideologies that capture the minds and hearts of people. For example, Communism was a most deceptive false messiah. Communists wanted to build a paradise on earth by getting rid of all rich capitalists and sharing bread equally among brothers. They were inspired by the beautiful Christian fellowship in Acts chapter 2 and tried to imitate it, but without the Holy Spirit. Their utopian ideal was so appealing that many gave their lives to accomplish it. But in the end it failed. Those who trusted in Communism lost everything. Then there is the American Dream. It captures the hearts and minds of young people until they only think about getting a good job and making a lot of money. They are convinced that after getting a high-paying job, marrying a fashion model, buying a suburban mansion, having 2.4 kids, and buying an SUV, they will be happy. They ignore everything to pursue this dream. But in their forties, they realize that it was just an illusion. Then they have a mid-life crisis and do something they should not do.

Hedonism can also be a false messiah. Many young people study hard and work hard, but do not get much of a reward. Then they come to a conclusion that they deserve a break. So they indulge in the satisfaction of the flesh. Some go crazy in wild rock concerts until they make a big mistake. Some use drugs to experience a momentary thrill and end up as lifelong slaves. Some just like to go shopping at the mall and run up credit card debt. Some become like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were immoral and violent. Such people are susceptible to road rage. Money can also be a false messiah. There is a girl from a broken family. Her heart is broken and her inner person has been badly damaged. But her father frequently gives her several hundred dollars of spending money. At school, she flashes hundred dollar bills. Then her friends forget about her tragic life situation and envy her, thinking that money makes her happy. Jesus warned that many false messiahs will come to lead us astray. We must remember Jesus' warning to watch out for false messiahs. In Luke 9:23 Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

In the second place, do not be frightened by the troubled world (9-11). In verses 9-10 Jesus tells his disciples that there will be wars and revolutions, and that nations and kingdoms will rise against each other. It sounds like a concise summary of world history. It also sounds like the front page of today's newspaper. Newspapers rarely promote stories of good and beautiful things that inspire noble humanity. Even more seldom do they promote the life-giving work of God. Friday night God established the beautiful spiritual house of Shepherd Joshua and Mary DeWitte. It should have been reported as the wedding of the century in all Chicago newspapers. But it was not mentioned. Yet the newspapers never fail to promote all the evils and tragedies of the world, especially conflicts and wars. We have heard about weapons of mass destruction and terrorist threats. We have heard of possible "renegade" nuclear weapons. We have heard about deadly earthquakes. Now many are concerned about the SARS virus to the degree that international travel has been restricted and many people are wearing white masks. When we hear about all these things it is easy to become fearful. But Jesus says in verse 9a, "When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened." We must not give in to fear. We must not be like the people of the world who see everything without God. We must remember that God is the Sovereign Ruler, whatever may be happening in the world. It is really good to pray first before watching the news or reading the paper.

In the third place, make up your minds not to worry (12-15). Jesus did not avoid hard teachings. He clearly told his disciples that persecution was coming and how to deal with it. 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." The early Christians were persecuted by the Jews who had

rejected Jesus as the Messiah and by the Roman government which wanted to enforce emperor worship. This all happened on account of Jesus' name. This persecution has continued to the present time. Cassie Bernall was a new Christian at Columbine High School. Two demon-possessed boys went on a shooting spree. One held a gun to Cassie's head and asked, "Do you believe in God?" She said, "Yes." And he shot her. Not all persecution is this severe. Sometimes it is the unspoken disapproval of peers toward one who prays before eating lunch in the cafeteria. Persecution should not surprise us. It is to be expected as Jesus' people. Moreover, there is God's purpose in it. Look at verse 13. "This will result in your being witnesses to them." God uses persecution to spread the gospel. For example, when the Jerusalem church was persecuted, the gospel spread all over the Roman world.

After hearing about the reality of persecution, it is easy to worry about it, thinking, "What would I do if I were in Cassie Bernall's place?" When we worry in our hearts, we can become slaves of anxiety and too powerless to open our mouths at all for Jesus. We may be tempted to take self-defense courses or to make many lawyer friends. But Jesus tells us to make up our mind not to worry beforehand. Look at verse 14. "But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves." Simply speaking, Jesus wants us to make a decision of faith to entrust our lives and futures into God's hands. He gives us a great promise. Look at verse 15. "For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."

In the fourth place, stand firm (16-19). In the fierce spiritual battle against God-haters, Jesus' people are vulnerable through their family relationships. Look at verse 16. "You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death." Some parents do not mind when their children live immoral lives and chew the wages of sin. But when their children confess Jesus as Christ, the parents become furious. It is not because they hate their children. It is because they hate Christ out of their guilty consciences. Jesus also said, "All men will hate you because of me" (17). How can Jesus' people survive in a world of hatred? Let's read verses 18-19. "But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life." One young shepherdess decided to live for Christ. Her father strongly opposed this and had her kidnaped against her will. At that moment, she decided to stand firm in Christ and God gave her wisdom to escape. Since then she has been blessed abundantly by God to marry a gracious man of God and have three beautiful children and a fruitful ministry. In fact, not a hair on her head was damaged. When we stand firm in Christ, he gives us eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Third, Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem (20-24).

In verses 20-24, Jesus makes a very specific prediction that Jerusalem would be desolated by foreign armies. Jesus warned his people to flee the city when they saw this being fulfilled. Just as Jesus said, in A.D. 70, General Titus besieged the city of Jerusalem with the Roman army. Those who remembered Jesus' words fled the city and survived. But those who despised Jesus and his words resisted the Roman army. Titus systematically destroyed them, killing one million people and sending one-hundred thousand into all the nations as slaves. Jerusalem was completely destroyed. Some zealous Jews made a last stand in the Jerusalem temple, thinking it was a sacred place. Titus totally destroyed the temple, tearing stone from stone until not one stone was left on another. The destruction was without mercy, even for pregnant women and nursing mothers. This was God's punishment upon Jerusalem's unbelief and failure to maintain God's blessing.

It also marked a transition period in God's history from the time of the Jews to the time of the Gentiles. Israel rejected God and abandoned the privilege of being a priestly nation. Then God chose the early Christians as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The fall of Jerusalem set the Christian church free from the grip of Judaism. Through the early Christians, God gradually conquered the Roman Empire with the gospel. The gospel spread to Germany, to England, and finally to America. Now we believe that God has made North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We must bear this privilege with holy reverence before God.

Fourth, they will see the Son of Man coming (25-38).

In verses 25-26, Jesus describes the world situation just before his Second Coming. The signs that precede his Second Coming are unmistakable. The heavenly bodies will be shaken. On earth men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming. This is the very time to look up at God. 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, Jesus Christ, will come again in power and great glory. This is where history is heading. Many godless people think that history is a bunch of chance events that are going nowhere. But this is not true. All of history is moving toward the Second Coming of

Jesus Christ in power and great glory. The words “in power and great glory” explain the nature of his second coming. It will be quite different than his first coming. When Jesus came first, he came as a humble and gentle baby in a manger. But when he comes again, it will be with power and great glory. He comes as King and Judge. With his one finger motion, each person’s eternal destiny will be decided. Those who were ashamed of him will be shamed. Those who hated him will suffer eternal punishment in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (2 Cor 5:10; Rev 21:8). But those who lived for his glory will receive eternal salvation. Look at verse 28. “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Jesus’ second coming is the time of final victory and redemption for his people. They were mistreated by God-haters and sometimes hung their heads in humiliation for his name’s sake. But when he comes again, final victory is given to them.

We learn a good lesson from the fig tree. When its leaves sprout we know that summer is near. Likewise, when we see many kinds of cataclysmic events in human history, we can know that the kingdom of God is near. Let’s read 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.” We must hold this word of promise in our hearts. Let’s read 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.” Let’s read 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.”

Jesus himself showed us the best example. Look at verses 37-38. “Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.”

The Son of Man, Jesus Christ, is coming again in power and great glory. This is the climax of human history. This is the day of victory and redemption for those who believe in him. May God plant faith in the Second Coming of Christ in our hearts and help us live for his glory.