

## **Luke's Gospel chapter 21 vv.25-38**

### **The Coming of the Son of Man**

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

2020 was a difficult and disturbing year for the whole of mankind. But the world's problems didn't stop at the advent of 2021 and so there continues to be much anxiety about the future - what does it hold for planet earth? Christian believers don't need to worry, their hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ and His second coming! Today's talk is the final part of what is called the Olivet discourse, spoken by the Lord himself on one of the days just before His crucifixion. Let's first read Luke 21:25-36 from the ESV:

“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. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” 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. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 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. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

I'll divide my talk into four sections:

1. The prophetic timeline.
2. The signs of the Lord's second coming.
3. The parable of the trees.
4. The authoritative words of the Lord Jesus.

#### **1. The prophetic timeline**

There are various identifiable events in this prophecy. Whilst all of these were future to the disciples who heard it, they cover past, present, and future events for us in the twenty-first century:

First, the Lord said the days would come when not one stone of the temple would be left upon another (v.6). That prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70, when Titus and his army razed the Temple at the destruction of Jerusalem, as we heard in last week's talk.

Second, and in answer to the disciples' question, "When would this happen?" (v.7), the Lord warned of false end-time prophecies by false Messiahs claiming to be Him and saying, "The time [of my kingdom] is close at hand!" (vv.7-9).

Third, that there would be a period of persecution for these early Christians to endure (vv.12-19). This happened during the first century A.D., as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Fourth, Jerusalem would be sieged and destroyed. This occurred in A.D. 66-70. As a consequence of their rebellion against the Romans, the Jews were "led captive" and dispersed throughout the Roman Empire (vv.20-24).

Fifth, Israel's capital city, Jerusalem, would then be dominated by Gentile powers until "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (v.24). The times of the Gentiles are outlined in Daniel's prophecies, for example, in 2:34-43, where the Roman Empire is the fourth and final kingdom (vv.40-43). Predictions of a future Gentiles' invasion is stated in Revelation 11:2, where both the courtyard outside the Temple and "the Holy City" will be given over to Gentile nations and trampled on for 42 months. Even though the nation of Israel was re-established in 1948, Gentile interference in Jerusalem will persist until the second coming of the Lord Jesus, their Messiah.

Sixth, preliminary warnings of God's vengeance will be indicated by visible signs in creation and distress amongst mankind (vv.23-27). These signs of worldwide unrest, natural disasters (such as famines and earthquakes), etc., had already been identified in vv.8-11, where the Lord said that the end of the age would not immediately follow them (vv.8-9).

Seventh, the end of the age occurs with the coming of the Son of Man who ushers in the kingdom of God upon earth (vv.27 & 31).

## **2. Signs of the Lord's second coming (vv.25-27)**

Some signs are becoming more apparent in today's world. By analysing these early indicators of the end times listed in vv.9-11, we notice that:

- wars, tumults, uprisings, and revolutions are regularly reported in world news.
- there're massive earthquakes and tsunamis, which seem to occur more frequently than in the past.
- many areas of the world suffer from drought and famines, etc., which are almost annual occurrences!
- pestilences and diseases are troublesome, continuing threats to world health, despite the sterling efforts of the UN and WHO to combat and eradicate them. Just think how the Covid-19 pandemic has devastated even the advanced western societies! All these are merely the beginnings of sorrows, or birth pains, of the coming great tribulation period (Matthew 24:8 & 21).

But we are yet to see the great signs from heaven mentioned in end of v.11. These are fleshed out somewhat in v.25:

- signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars.
- on earth anguish amongst the nations in their bewilderment because of the turbulence of the sea.
- people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world.

And the Lord promises that the powers of the heavens will be shaken! I read recently that the Sun's activity accounts for NLT50% of the 20<sup>th</sup> century warming effect on our globe.<sup>1</sup> Is this what "signs in the sun" means? Certainly so-called 'climate change' is causing anguish and distress amongst many nations for fear of the unknown (v.26). Perhaps "the roaring of the sea and the waves" in v.25 means disintegration of civilised society? (cp. Is.57:20, Dan.7.3, Rev.13:1-9). I think v.25 has symbolic meaning as well as describing actual physical events.

### 3. The parable of the trees (vv.28-31)

In last week's talk, we considered how the Lord graciously provided practical instructions for His disciples to act upon, when they encountered persecution from their fellow-Jews (vv.12-19); and when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman army (vv.20-24). Likewise, with respect to the signs of His second coming, He has specific exhortations for us living in the present time; and for the coming remnant, who will be caught up in that future siege of Jerusalem (see Zechariah 14:1-5). We/they are to look up to heaven because our redemption is drawing near. Redemption means deliverance from the situation His disciples find themselves in. For today's believers, the Lord will snatch us away to heaven to be with himself (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18). For the remnant, He'll come out of Zion as their Deliverer to establish His kingdom (see Romans 11:26).

The Lord spoke this parable of all the trees to enable His disciples to act upon His exhortation of vv.29-31. In Hosea 9:10, God compared the nation of Israel to the fig tree with first-ripe fruit. But when the Lord came, He found Israel to be unfruitful and so God cut it down (Luke 13:6-9). However, it will leaf again and then He'll receive fruit from a repentant and restored Israel. After 2000 years, the Israel was re-established as a sovereign state in 1948, that's almost 73 years ago. But the parable concerns all the trees not just the fig tree (cp. Matt.24:32-33 & Mark 13:28-29)<sup>2</sup>. The sprouting of all the trees shows that the hostile attitude of Israel's Gentile neighbouring states also indicates that the world is approaching the climax of this era.:

"In those days of [Gentile powers] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another [nation]. [The stone that was cut from a mountain by no human hand] shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to a [complete] end, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44-45).

Christ himself does this when He appears in power and great glory at His second coming. But Daniel ch.7 focuses on the fourth and final Gentile power, the revived Roman empire. It is therefore of interest to students of prophecy that the concept of a United States of Europe arose in the minds of world leaders in the aftermath of the second World War - just when Israel was accepted as a nation. Since then, we have seen the emergence of the European Union, a precursor to the revived Roman Empire. But we await further developments for the EU to become the leading world power. However, it seems that we are heading towards the last days of this dispensation.<sup>3</sup> As the Lord said the summer, that is, the kingdom of God, is already near! (vv.30-31, Darby). Christians are:

"Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2:13-14).

Jesus is coming! sing the glad word!  
Coming for those He redeem'd by His blood,  
Coming to reign as the glorified Lord!  
Jesus is coming again!

Jesus is coming! The dead shall arise,  
Loved ones shall meet in a joyful surprise,  
Caught up together to Him in the skies:  
Jesus is coming again!

Jesus is coming! His saints to release;  
Coming to give to the warring earth peace!  
Sinning and sighing, and sorrow shall cease:  
Jesus is coming again!

Jesus is coming! The promise is true:  
Who are the chosen, the faithful, the few,  
Waiting and watching, prepared for review?  
Jesus is coming again!

Jesus is coming, is coming again!  
Jesus is coming again!  
Oh, shout the glad tidings o'er mountain and plain!  
Jesus is coming again!

D.W. Whittle, pseudonym El Nathan (1840-1901)

#### 4. The authoritative words of the Lord Jesus (vv.32-36)

As you have listened to the Lord Jesus prophesying about the end times, do you believe His words? Have these prophecies shocked you? His opening words about the razing of the temple certainly shook the disciples' ideas about the way in which Messiah's kingdom would be set up; and their faith in the Jewish system of worship! That's why Peter, James and John asked Him privately afterwards, when they left the city and looked back upon the temple from the vantage point of the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3). They addressed Him, "Master" (v.7), for they regarded His word as authoritative. Do you? Do I? It's so important to have the correct attitude to all Scripture – that it's the word of the Lord! And notice how He commenced v.32, "Truly", that is, "I tell you the solemn truth", words which He always used to underline the importance of what He was saying. After all, all believers are pinning their futures on the fulfilment of His words!

To emphasise the reliability of His words, the Lord contrasted the temporary nature of the present universe with the eternal character of what He said:

"The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My Words will not pass away, never!" (Literal translation of v.33).

In v.32, the Lord is concerned about Israel's attitude towards Him:

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place."

The meaning of "this generation" is derived from Deuteronomy:

"[Israel dealt] corruptly with [the God of faithfulness]; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation" (32:5).

"The LORD saw it and spurned [Israel], because of [their provocation]. And he said, 'I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness'" (vv.19-20).

Time and time again the Lord used this description of the Jews who didn't accept Him as their Messiah. For example, see Matthew 11:16-24.<sup>4</sup> Here in v.32, Lord stated that Israel's unbelief will persist until all prophecy has come to pass.<sup>5</sup>

Before we consider the Lord's exhortations of vv.34-36, let's notice those of the earlier section of this prophecy. There the disciples were admonished:

- To beware of false Messiahs and of being led astray by them (v.8).
- Not to be alarmed, frightened, or terrified by world news of wars and commotions, etc. (v.9).
- To rely entirely on Him when testifying to the Gospel despite being persecuted, betrayed, or hated (vv.12-17).
- To trust His preserving grace, even if some of them were martyred for their testimony (vv.17-19).

Notice, finally, His special instruction for the disciples caught up in the siege of Jerusalem in A.D.60 (vv.20-21).

The Lord's exhortations of vv.34-36 are unique to Luke's record of the Olivet discourse. Unlike some of the exhortations in Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13, which are directed towards the future Jewish remnant of the tribulation period, Luke 21:34-36 are applicable to all His disciples until He appears as the Son of Man in power and great glory.

These exhortations open with the admonition, "But watch yourselves", meaning that His disciples must be constantly on their guard and live disciplined, godly lives. Their lifestyle must be consistent with their profession that Jesus is Master and Lord. Verse 34 specifies that, during Christ's absence, His followers must be careful lest their hearts become burdened, or overcharged, with worldliness, that is, self-indulgence and addictions. He said anxieties inevitably accompany such lifestyles. We might think it's only natural to worry because sin has introduced all kinds of difficulties into our world. However, in the Parable of the Sower, the Lord Jesus identified anxieties, alongside the deceitfulness of riches, pleasures, and desires for the things of the world, as issues which choke the effectiveness of the word of God and stifle spiritual life - the very things we're being warned about in v.34! How shameful it would be if any of us become so involved with the culture of the present age that we forget that the Lord is coming, and the day of His appearing suddenly comes upon us! That's why He said, "Beware" and that's why it is so important to take heed of what He is saying to each one of us today.

In v.35, the Lord said that the day of His appearing will arrive as an unwelcome event for mankind, trapping them in unbelief! His coming as the Son of Man will be a public, global event:

"Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (Rev.1:7).

His appearing will impact on "all who dwell on the face of the whole earth." This describes people who are completely taken up with making the most of life upon earth, without any reference to God or eternity.<sup>6</sup> But at the same time they're apprehensive about the future of the globe they live on:

"Men's hearts failing them for fear, and with [foreboding of] those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (v.26, KJV).

Such people are noticeable in today's world.

Therefore the Lord urges us, His disciples, to be in a continuous state of watchfulness and prayer (v.36). We mustn't sleep spiritually by living like those earthbound people. Rather, we should be looking intently for His appearing and not startled by it:

"Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!" (Rev.16:15).

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul gave this explanation:

"For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness...for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all the children of light, children of the day. We are not of

the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ...Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or [spiritually] asleep we might live with him" (vv.2-10).

In v.36, the Lord also presses upon us the need to stay awake and always to be praying that we may be deemed worth to escape these judgements that will fall upon the world so that we may be accounted worthy to stand before His judgment seat, when He gives His impartial assessment of the way we have lived our lives (see Romans 14:10).

### Verses 37-38

"And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him."

Luke's 'addendum' to this discourse is more than just a historical note. It's highlighting the fact that the Lord Jesus had been rejected by the Jews. Even though the ordinary people embraced His teaching, there was no place He could stay in Jerusalem overnight. But God will enthrone Him in Zion as their true King when He appears on the Mount of Olives in power and in great glory (see Psalm 2 with Zechariah 14:4).

### Conclusions

In this prophetic discourse, the Lord outlined events that His disciples would encounter throughout the generations of Christian witness until His second coming. He gave clear instructions as to how they must live in faithfulness to Him and with that hope in Him. Therefore, they would know what to do and when. Today, we have seen they contain many practical exhortations which we can apply to ourselves. Above all, as we sense our world system is beginning to 'fit' with the parable of the trees, we must apply v.28 to ourselves:

"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Perhaps the meaning of the words "straighten up and raise your heads" are somewhat understated in translation. The idea is that we shouldn't be cast down by the difficulties of Christian discipleship, but that we should look upwards to heaven from where our Deliverer is coming and be elated/energised by the prospect! We therefore rejoice as El Nathan's hymn puts it:

Our Lord is now rejected,  
And by the world disowned;  
By the many still neglected,  
And by the few enthroned;  
But soon He'll come in glory,  
The hour is drawing nigh,  
For the crowning-day that's coming  
By-and-by!

The heavens shall glow with splendour;  
But brighter far than they,  
The saints shall shine in glory,  
As Christ shall them array:  
The beauty of the Saviour  
Shall dazzle every eye,  
In the crowning-day that's coming  
By-and-by!

Our pain shall then be over:  
We'll sin and sigh no more,  
Behind us all our sorrow,  
And nought but joy before:  
A joy in our Redeemer,  
As we to Him are nigh,  
In the crowning-day that's coming  
By-and-by!

Let all who look for, hasten  
The coming joyful day,  
By earnest consecration  
To walk the narrow way;  
By gathering in the lost ones,  
For whom our Lord did die,  
For the crowning-day that's coming  
By-and-by!

O! the crowning-day is coming,  
Is coming by-and-by;  
When our Lord shall come in power  
And glory from on high!  
O, the glorious sight will gladden  
Each waiting, watchful eye,  
In the crowning-day that's coming  
By-and-by.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk, T1195 entitled The coming of the Son of Man, Luke 21:25-38.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>A *Pocket Guide to Climate Change*, p.72, 2018, Answers in Genesis, Kentucky, USA.

<sup>2</sup>Luke has a worldwide view, rather than just a Jewish outlook.

<sup>3</sup>This dispensation is the Gospel age, the day of God's grace in which the Gospel is preached, and men have the opportunity to repent and be saved.

<sup>4</sup>Matthew 11:16; 12:39, 41-42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34.

<sup>5</sup>Note the repetition of "come to pass" in this prophecy (21:7, 9, 28, 31-32, 36), which is a frequently used expression by Luke (1:2, 5, 8, 20, 23, 38, 41, 44, 59, 65; 2:1-2, 6, 13, 15, 42, 46; 3:2, 21-22; 4:3, 23, 25, 36, 42; 5:1, 12, 17; 6:1, 6, 12-13, 16, 36, 48-49; 7:11; 8:1, 17, 22, 24, 34-35, 40, 56; 9:7, 18, 28-29, 33-37, 51, 57; 10:13, 21, 32, 36, 38; 11:1-2, 14, 26-27, 30; 12:40, 54-55; 13:2, 4, 17, 19; Luke 14:1, 12, 22; 15:10, 14; 16:11-12, 22; 17:11, 14, 26, 28; 18:23-24, 35; 19:9, 15, 17, 19, 29; 20:1, 14, 16-17, 20:33; 22:14, 24, 26, 40, 42, 44, 66; 23:8, 12, 19, 24, 31, 44, 47-48; 24:4-5, 12, 15, 18-19, 21-22, 30-31, 37, 51).

<sup>6</sup>Revelation 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10.

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