

The King Is Coming

Mark 13:24–37

Scripture's overarching theme is Holy God condescending to redeem sinful, rebellious people, and bring an end to their offensive death-producing sin. He draws them to life and communion in himself. Communion with God is what we are made for, but sin destroys it and us. The Old Testament records cycles where God intervenes in the increasing sin and destruction of humankind by judging their sin. God sets a limit on how much offense and treason he will tolerate at any given time. When that measure is reached, he brings it to an end.

The greatest judgment against sin — the greatest ending of rebellion — was when he poured out the full measure of his wrath on his own Son who died as a sinner's substitute. Jesus, the Son of God knew no sin, but became sin so that those who look to him in faith might become the righteousness of God. He took the blame, bore the wrath of God for those who will end their rebellion against God and believe on the Lord Jesus. This is the greatest story ever told. This is the best news you will ever hear. Sinful people can be made right with Holy God through the work of the Son of God.

God's rescue mission was executed in Jesus's first coming to usher in God's grace-filled kingdom. There remains another coming of the Lord. For those in Christ, we look forward to his second coming with joyful anticipation. The trials and tribulations of the world, however terrible in the moment, will seem forgettable when we see our King coming. ***Rejoice in glorious hope! Our Lord and Judge shall come and take his servants up to their eternal home!*** But those outside of Christ — those who count on their own goodness, or their own cleverness to figure out life — they will be terrified at the awful sight of the King of kings when he returns to judge the world. Today's passage should either strengthen you in hope for the hard times ahead, or terrify you of the certainty of righteous wrath against those who persist as God's enemies. Let's pray, then read the Scripture. **[PRAY]**

Mark 13:24–37 — ²⁴“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near,

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at the very gates. 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.

³² “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—
³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

We have two main points: **What?** and **So What?**

What is Jesus talking about in this passage? **v 26** tells us He is speaking of his literal return to earth as the Righteous Judge and Conquering King. The King is coming! Recall from the verses just above that he predicts terrible days of persecution for his people. In those days the combined evil of rebellious sinners and demonic forces wage war against God’s people. Roman rulers did all those things in the first century; God’s people have experienced persecution in varying decrees throughout history, and there is a terrible time of tribulation yet to come. But once the world and the demonic forces have fully arrayed themselves against God, the Son of God will personally and physically terrify them, decisively ending their rebellion. We pick up in **v 24** where the rest of the story comes in.

Let’s dig in to what Jesus is revealing about his coming in righteous judgment. The language of frightening phenomena in the creation — darkened sun, moon that does not shine, falling stars, powers in the heavens shaken — it may sound like science fiction to our ears, but this is standard language used by Old Testament prophets to describe a day when God comes in judgment. 1st Century Jews would have quickly recognized the prophetic homiletic device that Jesus is using as a picture of judgment. Let’s look at two OT examples. First, God’s judgment through Babylon in

Isaiah 13:6–13 — Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!

⁷ Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. ⁸ They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. ⁹ Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. ¹² I will make people more rare

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than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

And just a brief look in **Zephaniah 1** to underscore the point. There are several more, and you are smart people who can do your own homework and see if these things be true. **Zephaniah 1:14–15** —

¹⁴ The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness...

These prophetic metaphors describe God's judgment as he completely sweeps away everything that rebellious sinners rely on and utilize to express their independence **from God** and contempt **for God**.

You've counted on city walls for defense; You've counted on the economy and your ability to gain whatever you want. You've counted on stable weather and the sun coming up another day; You've counted on your ingenuity to live your life in the way that you see fit and ignore God's laws.

All gone. All swept away. God will not be ignored. He will bring an end to sinners and their sin when it reaches the measure he has fixed. Prophets describe this as the Lord coming. When we look back in Mark 13, we see this same language and understand that Jesus is speaking of a day of God's righteous judgment against people or expressions of sin when he brings them to an end.

v 26 pairs this prophetic language with Jesus coming in great power and glory. One of the challenges of this passage is how we understand what Jesus says about his coming in **v 26** with what he says in **v 30** — Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. **All these things** in **v 30** includes **the Son of Man coming** in **v 26**. The most direct reading of the passage is that "this generation" refers to those he is speaking at that moment. A generation is understood to be 40 years. Jesus did not physically return in that generation. Critical liberals point to this passage and say that it is evidence that there are errors in the Bible. But is this an error?

We took time to understand the prophetic language and what it indicates: You have reached the measure of systemic and ongoing rebellion that God will tolerate. Now He is coming in dramatic judgment to end it, and reset how things will move forward. Jesus did not return literally and physically in that generation. But we do know that in 70 AD judgment came on the temple, which stood as a symbol of human pride, self-righteousness. The defunct sacrificial system was brought to a decisive end. In other words, God sovereignly used the Roman army to destroy the systemic rebellion of godless religious leaders against the Son of God and his final, once-for-all sin sacrifice.

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The day of the Jews closed. The wells of salvation opened up to the Gentiles. Sacrifice as just a reminder of sins gives way to faith in Christ's redeeming work. We left the day of national Israel; the Church of the Lord Jesus is established. Jewish branches broken off, as Romans 11 says; wild Gentile branches are grafted in. That's me, and that you. And that is as **radical a change** and reset as can occur. It happened in that generation — within 40 years “all these things” occurred.

Well, that answers one piece of the puzzle: this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. But it does not deal with the literal, physical return of the Lord Jesus. How do we understand that, which is taught clearly here and in other places of the scripture? The Lord is coming again as conquering king, as we have already read in the call to worship this morning.

It is not unusual for prophecies to have a near term fulfillment and a long-term fulfillment. The most obvious way to deal with the Lord's second coming is to understand his literal and physical return as a future event that he is prophesying. The short-term fulfillment was seen within 40 years. The long-term fulfillment is yet to come, and that return of our Lord and King serves as the source of our hope! His second and final return to the Earth will culminate his ultimate victory over sin and death, as described in Revelation and other places. All the judgments foretold by the prophets serve as lesser pointers and reminders that God will not tolerate wickedness and rebellion forever. He occasionally dips into the **filling reservoir of his righteous wrath** and pours out a limited judgment to bring an end to **some particular** expression of sin. His Great Day will be limitless judgment. None will survive, save those who have believed in Christ as their substitute wrath bearer.

Talk about bringing an end to systematic rebellion of both human sinners and demonic forces! Satan himself, and his demonic generals will be cast into the lake of fire and sulfur and will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Those who persist in unbelief and rebellion will ultimately be cast in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is our king in power and glory, bringing to an end, sin, and death that has wrecked creation since Genesis 3. God has the last word. God will not be ignored. The end is not in doubt. Jesus tells us this with certainty. God exalts him to the highest place. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

This is the **What?** of the passage: King Jesus returns in triumph to claim his own. He will rule and reign with his children in the New Creation. **When will this happen?** No one knows but the Father. He reserves the date to himself. One of the easiest ways to spot a false teacher is when they start

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circling dates for the Second Coming. As we noted earlier in the chapter, Jesus does not point us to calendar dates but to costly discipleship. We are to **be being ready**.

Here is the **So What** of this passage.

We are to recognize the signs of increasing evil. We know that God will not tolerate rebellion and sin forever. He will end the attempt to usurp his throne. Every increase of systematic rebellion against God and his law should sharpen our awareness like tinder buds on tree limbs. In a month or so, we will see ornamental trees and flowers in staring to bloom. We will know that spring is here. When wickedness and hostility to the people of God increase, when those in sin's grip seek to desecrate, destroy, and deconstruct all that Christ is, we know that the Second coming of our Lord and Judge is near, at the very gates! His return is nearer now than when we walked in the door.

In preparation for this, as we saw earlier in the chapter, we are to watch, practice, grow. Watch for his return. Practice obedience to his commands. Grow in knowledge of God and obedience to God.

- Prepare yourself through humble, sacrificial, holy living that serves others. This is how you learn to deny yourself.
- Wage and win battles against selfishness and pride of the sinful nature. Doing so equips you to stand in the tribulation.
- Deepen your prayer life and plead with God for mercy on saints and sinners alike.
- Grow in knowledge of God's word; his word will sustain us in the Dark Day. That's the powerful reminder of v 31. When it seems the whole world is coming apart because of wickedness; when there is increasing hostility and persecution of the people of God; when the world hates you and hauls you to prison; when they take away your property; when your family hates you, **hear this and stand on this: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.** The word of God reveals the truth of God. It is immutable, infallible, and fixed forever in the heavens. We stand now with certainty on his word, and will do so for eternity.

There is a recurring refrain through this chapter that involves being on guard, being watchful, not being led astray, not falling asleep. The Lord knows our tendency to be lazy and complacent in our walk with him and our anticipation of his return. He closes this chapter with an illustration about a master putting servants in charge while he goes on a journey. He tells them to be diligent about their work, and stay awake and watchful because they do not know when the master will return. So, this beautiful and encouraging admonition from the Lord: **Stay awake.** Watch for his return. Be on guard.

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Why is this encouraging? Because it reminds us that the world and Satan do not have the final say. We will be not left orphans; he is coming again, and coming soon, to take his servants up to their eternal home. He will righteously judge all evil and all sin. No one gets away with anything. No tax cheat who believes he has escaped IRS scrutiny will get away with theft. The glorious name of our Lord will not be defiled. Every moral failure will be punished. Every sin of omission and every sin of commission will be judged and paid for — either by the Lord Jesus who bears the penalty of sin for those who have turned to him in faith, or those who have refused to come to him will pay their own penalty of death.

This has been an all-in, or all-out sermon, hasn't it? The reason the sermon has been that way is because what Jesus said is that way. But his call through the Gospel is the greatest news you will ever hear. It's this: Christ died for sinners. You have only to believe on him and be saved.

Today is the day of grace. This is a moment of grace. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. As we have seen, the day of grace will come to a close. He will usher in the day of judgment and end human history with his soon return. Those who remain in outside of Christ can only expect fearful and terrible judgment. Why would you not run into the arms of Christ, who says, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You have only to look away from your sin and self-effort and believe in the redeeming work of the Son of God.

PRAY

Believers: Are you awake? Are you on guard? Is increasing obedience to Christ evident in your life? Make it so this morning. Don't let him come and find you asleep.

Unbelievers: Confess your sins to Christ, ask his forgiveness, and fully receive it as you trust him for your salvation.