

Redemption Drawing Near

Luke 21:25-38

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In September and October we had a series of sermons about American religious beliefs. One interesting topic we did *not* explore is what people in our country believe about the second coming of Jesus. Now, I am not aware of any detailed studies in the last few years, and answers vary depending on how questions are asked. However, all surveys find that a majority of Americans, maybe over 60% say they believe that Jesus Christ will someday return to this earth. And between 30-40% of folks think this will happen in the next 30 years. Keep in mind these surveys were all taken before anyone heard of COVID. I find it interesting that more Americans apparently believe in Jesus' second coming that they do His deity, being God. Well, today we explore a passage where Jesus speaks about His return. Our journey through Luke's Gospel brings us to Luke 21:25-38. If you have a Bible please turn there, otherwise the verses will be on the screen.

Incidentally, Matthew 24 Mark 13 are parallel passages, meaning slightly different accounts of what Jesus said that day. I am assuming he didn't give this sermon more than once. Now, there is no contradiction, but, Matthew seems to provide a more detailed account of what Jesus said. Luke, apparently summarizes the highlights of that message, and this will be our focus this morning. Now, this may not be the easiest passage to understand, but the Lord wants to speak to us through it. Let's pause and pray He would give understanding and encouragement through His word today.

We are in Jerusalem, Passover week, in the spring of 33 A.D. Jesus has just finished telling His followers (Verse 5-24) some of the most horrible news they can imagine. One day their city, Jerusalem, and the magnificent temple in which they worship the Lord, will be destroyed. That is exactly what happened 37 years later. Jesus then, changes His focus to something which will happen, well at least

1987 years later. **Luke 21:25-27 – “Then there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and there will be anguish on the earth among nations bewildered by the roaring of the sea and waves. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from fear and**

**expectation of the things that are coming on the world, because the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.** Remember the Son of Man is the Messiah. Jesus is speaking of himself and His return. The term “they will see” seems to indicate this is a public event. It coincides with what the angel told the disciples when Jesus ascended to heaven. **Acts 1:11 – This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have**

**seen him going into heaven.”** The significant of this event is highlighted in what Jesus says next. **Luke 21:28 – But when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is near.”**

No matter how difficult things may seem, this is the hope for believers in Jesus Christ, His return. In **Titus 2:13** the Apostle Paul says, **we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.** His return means he will rule as the Messiah King in a kingdom where there is (Revelation 21) no more death, sorrow, crying or pain.

Jesus then seeks to provide further encouragement. **Luke 21:29-31 – Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> As soon as they put out leaves you can see for yourselves and recognize that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> In the same way, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.** Just as we can recognize signs within the natural realm. We should be able to recognize signs in the spiritual realm. Various signs remind us Jesus will indeed return. **Luke 29:32 – Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all things take place.** Friends, this is one of the more difficult statements Jesus spoke. He seems to indicate His return will occur within the lifetime of those listening to Him that day. I do not believe that is what Jesus meant, because if it was, He was wrong. Wrong is not something I believe Jesus can be. My opinion is by “generation,” Jesus is referring to all the people living between the time of His ascension and return. However, that is

just one of five possible interpretations the ESV Study Bible gives as to what Jesus might have meant. If you are confused by what Jesus says, as I was for years, I would be glad to chat with you about it. Anyway, Jesus then adds this encouragement **Luke 21:33 – Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.** No matter when or where we live, we can trust what Jesus says.

He then gives these instructions **Luke 21:34,35 – “Be on your guard, so that your minds are not dulled from carousing, drunkenness, and worries of life, or that day will come on you unexpectedly <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For it will come on all who live on the face of the whole earth.** Unlike what occurred in 70 A.D., when directly impacted just those living in and around Jerusalem, the events surrounding the return of Jesus will be felt on every part of the globe. Then Jesus concludes **Luke 21:36 – But be alert 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.”** In other words, pray, that you will be faithful to the Lord, no matter what oppositions and challenges you face in this time before the return of Jesus. Be faithful so that one day, when He comes, you will hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Ok, that is a quick trip through the passage. For the rest of the time I want to remind you of four big picture truths about Jesus' second coming that are taught in the Bible and reflected in this passage. Now, I thought some of you have studied a lot of the details concerning this topic, and that is great. This morning, however we will focus on four things in the big picture that we always need to keep in mind.

#1 The return of Jesus Christ will really happen. That is taught in our passage today, throughout the New Testament and in the Old Testament as well. One of the most explicit passages is **1 Thessalonians 4:15b-17 – We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together**

**with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.** The return of Jesus has always been an important part of Christian belief. The Apostle's Creed declares that Jesus “will come again to judge the living and the dead.” Confessions of faith in almost all Protestant churches affirm this. That includes here at Chisholm Baptist Church where we say, “*We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom.*” I guess it is no big surprise that about 60% of Americans say they believe in Jesus' second coming. What is shocking, however, is meeting pastors, of various denominations, who hesitate to affirm that Jesus will return to earth. They may be talking about Jesus' spiritual return through the church, but this is something very different from what the Bible means by His second coming. Yes, I understand the idea of someone who was on earth almost 2000 years ago actually coming back seems strange to many. Yet, I would say that someone who does not believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus to earth is not truly a Christian.

Now, I know believers in Jesus who are pre-tribulation rapture, mid-tribulation rapture, post-tribulation rapture, pre-wrath rapture and some amillennialists. There are probably even Post-millennialist Christians out there, though I do not think I have ever met one. Christians do not agree on all the details surrounding the second coming of Christ, but they do agree, Jesus will return to earth to establish His kingdom. This is culmination of God's story that started back in the garden of Eden where God promises (Genesis 3:15) that the seed of the woman, Jesus, will crush the head of the seed of the serpent, Satan. It really will occur.

#2 We are living in the last days. At the same time we need to realize that the Apostles and other 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians also believed *they were living* in the last days. Were they wrong? No. It is important to understand the last days encompass the entire period of time between Jesus ascending into heaven and His return. In fact 10 days after His ascending, the events on the day of Pentecost are seen as a fulfillment of what the Prophet Joel said what happened in *the last days* (Acts 2:17) other passages that use this type of language includes **Hebrews 1:2a – But in these last days God has**

**spoken to us by his Son.** And **1 Peter 1:20** – **Jesus was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but for your sake was made manifest in *the last times*.** Perhaps most clear is **1 John 2:18** – **Children, it is *the last hour*, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is *the last hour*.** Pastor Dan, this is getting confusing. Let me try to explain.

In God's great plan of redemption history, the next great event following what happened near Jerusalem in the spring of A.D. 33, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, is His return. You might point to some other things that will occur first, but those are kind of foot notes, to the main event, which is the second coming of Jesus. That happens on *the last day*, the day which marks the end of this age, of human history. The last days are, as I said, the time between Jesus' ascension to heaven and this last day, His return. As, of now the last days have lasted 1987 years. During these last days, as **1 John** says, there will be many Anti-christs, there will be many natural disasters, there will be many tribulations. These, all lead up to the one Anti-Christ, and the one great tribulation which will occur at the time of the last day, when the Lord Jesus returns. Keeping this in mind helps us make sense of passages like **Luke 21** where Jesus talks both about the tribulation of Jerusalem's destruction and the great tribulation which will precede His return. It also helps us understand why believers in Jesus in almost every era, have believed He would come during their lifetime. Now, all these folks, if they are dead, were wrong about Jesus returning before they died. However, I believe that it is good and especially healthy for every Christian to believe Jesus could return during their lifetime and *to want* Jesus to come during their lifetime. We should believe Jesus could return and we should long for His return.

The analogy the Bible uses to describe all this is "Birth Pangs" or "Labor Pains." **Matthew 24:7,8** – **For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.** <sup>8</sup> **All these events are the beginning of labor pains.** Now, I am not an expert on how this works, but from *what I understand*, a woman may experience labor pains over a period of time, before the birth actually occurs. The labor pains

usually become more frequent and more intense as the time of birth gets closer. Likewise, during the last days, this 1987 years and counting period, there will be a wide variety of tribulations, but we can expect these to become more intense as we approach the great tribulation and the day of the Lord's return. However, experiencing labor pains doesn't necessarily mean the baby will be born at that moment. Which brings us to:

#3 None of us knows when Jesus will return. After Jesus spoke of His second coming, had said, **Matthew 24:36** – **"Now concerning that day and hour no one knows – neither the angels of heaven nor the Son – except the Father alone."** After His resurrection, the disciples ask Jesus if He is going to begin His reign as Messianic King. Jesus responds, **Acts 1:7** – **It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority.** Friends, it is not for us to know God's timetable. We do not know when the Lord Jesus will return.

Remember the disappointment of 1978. Like many folks I had read Hal Lindsey's book "The Late Great Planet Earth." It was published in 1970, I read it probably in 1974. Lindsey argued that the establishment of the modern nation of Israel in 1948 was "The Budding of the Fig Tree" and that Jesus would likely return within a generation, 30 years, of that event. When that didn't happen, I felt disappointed. Lindsey changed his calculation, suggesting a Bible generation was likely 40 years, implying 1988 was the date by which Jesus would return.

When that didn't happen, the budding of the fig tree was moved to 1967, when Israel won the six day war and gained full control of Jerusalem. However, 40 years later, 2007, Jesus had still not returned. Now, I do not mean to pick on Mr. Lindsey. I believe he is a faithful servant of the Lord, maybe much more faithful than me and his ministry has benefited many. However, I think he made a mistake when he implied *he knew* when Jesus would return. And every other Bible teacher makes a mistake when he or she does that. Friends, it is good to want Jesus to return in your lifetime. You should realize that it may happen in your lifetime. But neither you, nor anyone else, knows when that will be. God knows, but we do not.

And when people ask, so where is this Jesus you say is going to return, or when you yourself start having doubts, remind yourself of what the Apostle Peter says, **2 Peter 3:8-10a – Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is *patient* with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.**

#4 The promise that Jesus will return has important practical implications for us. It seems very strange to me that some Christians focus more on figuring out when Jesus will return, or mapping out the details surrounding His return, than on *how we should be living* in light of Jesus promised return. So, how are we supposed to be living? Well, Jesus gives some instructions in **Luke 21:34,35 – Be on your guard, so that your minds are not dulled from carousing, drunkenness, and worries of life, or that day will come on you unexpectedly <sup>35</sup> like a trap.** Now some verses, say “Do not let your hearts be dulled” and that is the more literal translation. However, in the Ancient world the heart was the center not of someone’s emotions, but of his or her will. Jesus is saying stay sharp in your thinking, stay sharp in your priorities. Do not get caught up with carousing, drunkenness, or the worries of life. Those were 1<sup>st</sup> Century issues, and they are still probably today. A focus on sensual pleasure, abuse of alcohol, being consumed with “The worries or busyness of life” might be problems in themselves. Jesus point, however, is that people become obsessed and consumed with these things and lose site of the fact that Jesus will one day return. I would add that an obsession with recreation, entertainment, or maybe politics, is another obstacle that keeps folks from focusing on the things that matter the most. And why is the return of Jesus one of the things that matter the most? Because it is the heart of understanding that this life we are living right now, *is not all there is*. Life in Jesus' kingdom (both millennial kingdom and eternal kingdom) is much longer and much more important, then the plus or minus 80 years you spend on this planet. The stream of human history of which we are part, now in the year of our Lord, 2020, is not all there is. Jesus kingdom, millennial and eternal, is much longer and much more important than even human history. The return of

Jesus reminds us that there is more to life than fame, fortune, fun, food, football and even friends and family. The return of Jesus reminds us that the purpose of life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. It reminds us that today, now, our focus needs to be on honoring the Lord and serving others. The second coming is a reminder to heed Jesus' words of **Matthew 6:19,20 – “Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal.** It reminds us to heed the Apostle Paul's instructions in **Colossians 3:1b-4 – Seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**

By reminding us that this life is not all there is, the return of Jesus is a source of great encouragement. This concludes His teaching on the return of Jesus with **1 Thessalonians 4:18 – Therefore encourage one another with these words.** Do not spend all your time *debating* what it means to “Meet the Lord in Air” and speculating about when that will occur. Instead, *encourage one another* with the fact that it will happen. All the tough things, the trials and tragedies in your life will not last, they are temporary, but when Jesus returns, **1 Thessalonians 4:17b – We will always be with the Lord.** And there will be not death, no sorrow, no tears, and no pain. Praise God! And be encouraged, my friends.