

Did you know that in 2018 thousands around the world lost their lives to natural disasters? A tragic reminder of how rapidly nature can become deadly.

A 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck Papua, New Guinea (**picture**) in February triggering a major aftershock and landslides, 145 died. Another half a million were affected by the disaster. Floods struck in North Korea (**picture**), killing 151 and destroying 800 buildings; Nigeria (**picture**) killing 200 and destroying 13,000 homes. Japan (**picture**) killing 220. Uwajima, a city on Japan's Shikoku island, had almost 15" of rain in two hours. Monsoons in India (**picture**) killed 361. Many victims were crushed in landslides. 425 died in Guatemala when the Fuego volcano (**picture**) erupted. Two tsunamis struck Indonesia (**picture**), one in September and another just before Christmas. The December one was accompanied by an earthquake. Some 3200 people died with entire cities leveled and more than 300,000 were left homeless.

**Do you care?** I have to confess that I don't. Until I googled disasters of 2018, I didn't remember any of these. The only disaster that sticks out in my mind from last year was the California wildfire (**picture**). Primarily, because it was in the States, continually on the news and the City of Paradise was destroyed... I have a college friend from Paradise.

It's easy to have a casual, apathetic attitude toward our text in Luke 21. The passage is prophetic. Jesus is describing events that will take place during the Tribulation. Because of my view of prophecy, in that I believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, I won't be here. So, it doesn't affect me, so it'd be easy to not care and that's a wrong spirit. Please turn to Luke 21:25-36 (p. 881).

The suffering described is horrible. If the rapture occurred, it could begin today. Friends and loved ones could go through this if they don't know Christ. Our hearts must always be filled with compassion for human suffering.

Yet, often we're like King Hezekiah. After he miraculously recovered from a fatal disease, he blows it and shows all his wealth and the riches of Israel to visiting some Babylonian envoys. The prophet Isaiah rebuked him for his pride. Because he'd had exposed the country's wealth, the Babylonians would return as an invading army and take the riches and nation into captivity, including Hezekiah's own sons. Hezekiah makes one of the most calloused statements found in Scripture, "*The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.*" For he thought, "*Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?*" (2 Kings 20:19). What a lack of compassion for future generations! Because what Jesus is teaching in Luke 21 won't happen to the Church, we can wrongly have that same attitude.

Last Sunday we worked through the terrible suffering inflicted by humans on humans as God judged the Jews. It was a prequel to God's coming judgement on the world for rejecting Jesus. God's clock is ticking. Our world is growing more evil. We're seeing prophesy fulfilled before our eyes. "*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil...*" (Isaiah 5:20).

In 73 AD, Rome destroyed Jerusalem. 1 million Jews were killed with another 100,000 taken prisoner. Jews scattered over the globe. But in this second portion, (vss. 25-36,) it's not humans inflicting suffering on humans. These are "natural" disasters. God reverses His creative acts and is destroying creation as He judges the world. **The Coming De-Creation** takes place during the Great Tribulation before Christ returns at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. In our text, Jesus lifts His eyes off of Jerusalem to the end of the world.

History is going somewhere. It's not circular as the Stoics (**picture**), believed. There is no "circle of life." (Sorry, *Lion King* (**picture**) fans.) God's Word teaches that history has a final goal. All of history is *His-story*. Jesus Christ is Lord of all and will one day visibly rule all of His creation.

Just as God wants us to remember His promise to never send another universal flood whenever we see a rainbow, when we observe a natural disaster like an earthquake or tornado, God wants us to recall that Jesus is coming back to judge this world. Natural disasters will only increase in number and power as the end draws closer. We're on the brink of **The Coming De-Creation**.

It's ironic how we prepare for nearly everything except our soul's destination. If we travel somewhere we prepare by making reservations at hotels and on airlines. We prepare for almost everything, but where we'll spend eternity.

Are you prepared? It's shocking that such a powerful event is often ignored. We're quick to believe so many other things, yet find it hard to believe Jesus' own words about His return. It's going to happen! Jesus promised it would. In His own words: "*Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*" (Matt. 24:44). If you're taking notes...

**God's judgement will fall on His creation.** For Jesus' disciples the language He uses is very familiar. It's the same apocalyptic language used by the Prophets. These meteorological and astronomical upheavals brought to mind several Old Testament prophecies where similar wording was used to describe the destruction of earthly governments, particularly invaders like Babylon. Prophets spoke to both their day and future ones. It's why we need, as we mentioned last week, interpretative bifocals, to see both near and far.

Understanding this explains why prophets often sound as if they're talking about the end of the world; it's because they *are* talking about the end of the world. They're viewing the whole panorama of God's judgement, the events of their own times in the greater context of God's final judgement. Jesus warns His disciples that the destruction of Jerusalem is a small dustup compared to the final judgement. He points to signs that will precede His coming so His followers won't be discouraged. Whatever these signs look like, they're so terrifying people will faint just from the terror that accompanies them.

God de-creates His creation. While we think of humanity being under the curse of sin, we overlook that when Adam and Eve sinned, all of creation was cursed. Romans 8:18-25 speaks of creation longing for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming and God's restoration, and finally being set free.

How do we know that Jesus is speaking of the future, of the final judgement? Because of the cosmic cataclysms He describes. It's been tragic in the past when people ignored obvious signs of something devastating coming. But events much worse than this world has ever seen are coming...

**Creation will unravel.** If you've lived through a tornado or another natural disaster, you know how helpless you feel. I've never been in a tornado but I've driven through terrible thunderstorms where I was white-knuckling it.

Our worst experiences are like a mosquito bite compared to this coming day of God's judgment. The Greek word translated "*perplexity*" normally refers to being chained. People will be "*chained*" by fear. The word for *fainting* only appears this once in the New Testament. It literally means "to stop breathing." That's because God's coming judgement is so terrifying, people will be scared to death. God created the heavens and He knows how to unplug them.

Every disaster is a prequel of the final judgement. Each earthquake, hurricane or terrorist attack is another spark in the inferno of God's judgement. But there's also grace. God doesn't withhold His wrath until the very end, but gives the world merciful warnings in advance of the final day. He's trying to wake us up, to get us to run to Jesus and find safety in His cross while there's time. If you trust Jesus to save you, you'll be delivered from the final judgement.

Revelation 15-19 describes the horrific judgement God sends during the Tribulation. While creation's unraveling terrifies the lost, it brings hope to those who trusted the Lord during the Tribulation (Rev. 7). These believers know Jesus coming will be soon. Believers today are not to look for signs, we have the Savior. Yet, as we see current events, we know that His return is near.

**Jesus the Creator returns for His New Creation.** Jesus comes on a cloud in power and glory. Maybe you remember the song, *Hold the Fort*. Writer, Philip P. Bliss (**picture**), wrote that song based on an event from the Civil War. A company of Union soldiers was commanded to defend an important supply depot at Altoona Pass. Soon surrounded by a much superior force of Confederate troops, their cause appeared hopeless. But suddenly, they caught sight of a white signal flag being flown from Kennesaw Mountain, 20 miles away. A message was conveyed across the miles: "*Hold the fort; I am coming.*" It was Sherman. A cheer went up and those Union soldiers held firm until reinforcements arrived. Bliss took this as an illustration of our spiritual conflict, of the need to stay faithful even while under attack, and to be faithful until Christ comes again.

*Ho, my comrades! see the signal waving in the sky!*

*Reinforcements now appearing, victory is nigh.*

*"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;*

*Wave the answer back to heaven, "By Thy grace we will."*

That's the picture, "*they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*" The lost are terrified by the upheavals of nature. But it brings hope to believers as Jesus returns on part of His creation, a cloud, to rescue them. His return is the fulfillment of His promise. It's the grand finale of the gospel. On the cross Jesus purchased our redemption; when He returns He'll consummate it. He came the first time in a manger and entered Jerusalem on a donkey, but He'll return in glory and power on a cloud.

*"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* Redeeming something means to buy it back. In one sense, we've already received our redemption. When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He paid the price to release us from all of our bondage to sin. But we haven't yet received all of the benefits of our redemption. In that sense our redemption is still drawing near. When He returns, we'll receive our full inheritance that God has for us.

**2. Pay attention for end time changes.** "*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.'*"

Jesus urges us to pay attention to what's taking place in the world. We're not to set dates, yet the continued decay of this world is a sign His coming is nearing. As warmer temperatures, sightings of robins are signs of spring, the cycle of trees sprouting leaves in Israel was the sign of coming summer.

The fig tree was totally bare in the winter. It looked dead. When summer came, leaves came back. It was impossible to not notice it. Increased violence, wars and natural disasters are signs God's timer is winding down.

The fig tree is an image of the nation of Israel (Luke 13:6; Hosea 9:10). Though Jesus' words are recorded in Matthew and Mark, Luke adds "*and all the trees,*" suggesting that more than one nation is involved. Maybe He was suggesting that the rise of nationalism is something to watch.

In recent years, we've seen a growth in nationalism and the emerging of new nations. The world I learned about in Geography class has dramatically changed. It could be a "sign" that the coming of the Lord is near. The key idea though is that of knowing what's going on. We're not to be hermits and withdraw from the world. We're to live in the tension of being *in* the world, yet not *of* the world.

Verses 32 is a problem verse. It's why some see this chapter as referring to what happened in Jerusalem's destruction in 73 AD. "*Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.*"

Famed skeptic, Bertrand Russell (**picture**), used this verse as one reason that he wouldn't become a Christian. He said it's obvious Jesus was wrong. In his book, *Why I am not a Christian*, he wrote: "*He certainly thought that his second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. In that respect, clearly he was not so wise as some other people have been, and he was certainly not superlatively wise.*"

2,000 years later, Jesus still hasn't returned. What's the answer? I don't know. There are half a dozen views. It's possible that Jesus was referring to the "*generation*" that'd be alive on earth when all of this takes place. Or, the word translated *generation* can mean "race." It could refer to the nation of Israel. Jesus uses it that way in Mark 8:12 and 9:19. Then, Jesus might have been reassuring His disciples that, in spite horrible suffering, the Jews would endure. The Jews are God's chosen people and are protected by God. They'll never be destroyed, but will need reassurance. Revelation 12 prophesies that there will be another attempted Jewish Holocaust just prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.

The difficulty with all end times prophecy is that people tend to fixate on the details, so they can predict a date for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. They have a checklist of signs that must be fulfilled, even though such a practice has always proved futile. Jesus' point is not on dates, but on always being ready.

**3. His Word will never change.** "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*" Jesus, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Godhead, has a permanence to His words that's not true of the material universe. Everything is temporary, but not His words. When this earth has turned to dust and the stars have been plucked from their sockets, the Bible will still exist.

Many products have expiration dates, or sometimes have a "best if used before" date. The Bible has a "best if used before date," but no expiration date. God's Word is "best if used before I die or Jesus returns." The Bible won't do you any good after you die or Christ returns. That's why we must read, study and obey it now. In a world that's increasingly unstable, we need something permanent on which to base our lives. God's Word stands forever. There are only two things in this world that are eternal – the souls of human beings and God's Word. If you want your life to matter for eternity, invest yourself in the Bible and reaching people for Christ.

Do you know God's eternal Word? Many know lots about sports, entertainment, or the financial markets. Many know more about the weather that constantly fluctuates than they know God's eternal Word. Please invest in something that eternally matters. Know the Book! Submit before God's Word, allowing the Spirit to use it to transform you to be more like Jesus.

**4. Guard your heart!** "*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*" Jesus moves from prophetic discourse to pastoral exhortation about what it means to live a faithful life in light of the events He's warned are coming. His first admonition was to *Know!* His second is to *Watch!* Both apply to God's people in every age, although they'll have a special meaning to Jews during the Tribulation. *Watch* doesn't mean to stand around looking for signs. It means, "Stay alert! Don't get caught unprepared!" That's the warning the Church desperately needs. If we don't watch...

**We're easily trapped.** J.C. Ryle (**picture**) insightfully said, "*There is no sin so great but a great saint may fall into it; there is no saint so great but he may fall into a great sin.*" We often doubt the vile potential of our own hearts.

One of the most moving books that I read this past year was, *When I Lay My Isaac Down* by Carol Kent (**picture**). Christian speaker and author, Carol Kent, got the phone call in the middle of the night that's worse than a parent's worst nightmare. Her son, Jason, a Christian and successful naval officer, had murdered his wife's ex-husband. He's now serving a life sentence. Though a Christian, he committed murder. He's seeking to serve the Lord though serving a life sentence. There's no sin beyond even a Christian.

*Dissipation* refers to a headache from a hangover. Jesus warns against partying and debauchery. While Scripture doesn't prohibit drinking, intoxication is a sin. Yet, how many consider these serious sins.

*Cares* refers to undue concern or worry about the things of this life. If you were listing the top ten sins, would worry be on your list? It makes Jesus' list. It's the little sins that trap us. Staying alert and watching for His imminent return protects us spiritually. No one goofs off at work if they think that the boss is about to walk in. It's the same principle.

No one ever looked at porn, flirted with someone other than their spouse, gossiped, or lost their cool when their heart was expectantly looking for Jesus' return. We easily live spiritually lethargic lives because we rarely think of Christ's return. Be honest. When was the last time that you thought about Jesus' return? Or, prayed for His soon return? We've lost that sense of expectancy we're to have and the early church had. Most of us are more cognizant of death than we are of Christ's return.

Scripture commands us to be expectant. "*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Phil 3:20); "*So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 1:7). The reason we're so easily trapped by sin is that we're not watching. If we get this, it will revolutionize our lives and revolutionize our church. Each of us needs to carefully examine his or her life for those things we'd be ashamed of if Jesus came back today...and He could.

**Stay alert.** "*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.*" A college professor had the mysterious habit of removing a tennis ball from his jacket pocket as he walked into the lecture hall each morning. He'd set it down on the corner of the podium. After giving the lecture for the day, he'd once again pick up the tennis ball, place it into his jacket pocket and leave the room. No one ever understood why he did this, until one day a student fell asleep during the lecture. The professor didn't miss a word of his lecture while he walked over to the podium, picked up the tennis ball and threw it, hitting the sleeping student squarely on the top of the head.

The next day, the professor walked into the room, reached into his jacket, and removed a baseball. No one fell asleep in his class the rest of the semester!

As believers, we're to always be alert, prepared for Jesus' coming at any moment. We must live in a continual state of expectation. How? *We pray.*

Too many of us have been taught some wrong form of spiritually toughing it out. We can't do it on our own. We're dependent on God's grace. I've been a believer since Jr Hi and I'm more aware today of how dependent and needy I am on the Lord and His grace, than I was even ten years ago.

This call to pray is only found in Luke. We must grow in this matter of prayer. We must pray for God's strength to walk through this earthly life unscathed. We pray that when Jesus returns we'll still be standing. This phrase, *to stand before the Son of Man*, is a courtroom picture and indicates a favorable verdict. It reminds us that we'll all appear before God and give an account. We're only qualified to stand in God's holy presence because the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ has been placed on our account.

Living in the light of Christ's return is to be a way of life. It requires God's grace and diligence. No one is found accidentally faithful on that last Day.

**Conclusion:** Godly Scottish Presbyterian preacher, Robert Murray McCheyne (**picture**) sometimes asked people, "Do you believe Jesus will return today?" They usually honestly replied, "No." Then McCheyne would say, "Then you had better be ready, for He is coming at an hour you think not!"

Jesus promises are not hypothetical or some "big maybe." He's coming back. Will you be ready? You can't say it's unexpected. He told us He's coming back. Yet, Jesus warned us that the worst thing that could happen would be for the Day of His return to come on a person unexpectedly.

In the spring of 1980, the blue skies above Oregon began to be obscured by steam rising from Mt. Saint Helens. Geologists warned an eruption was imminent. Residents living near the area were ordered to evacuate. Emergency personnel entered the area with loudspeakers blaring, "Danger! Evacuate the area immediately." Flashing road signs were erected that said, "Warning, Warning, Warning. Evacuate immediately." But there was an 83-year-old man named Harry Truman (**picture**), no relation to the president. Harry operated a lodge at Spirit Lake, 5 miles from Mt. St. Helens. He laughed at the warnings.

Officials argued with him to leave, but when he stubbornly refused, he was granted permission to stay. He said, "Nobody knows more about this mountain than old Harry—and it wouldn't dare blow up on me." On the morning of May 18, 1980 Harry woke up and probably followed his habit of feeding his 16 cats, then fixing breakfast for himself. At 8:13 a.m. Mt. St. Helens (**picture**) exploded with the force of a 23 megaton atom bomb. The top 1,500 feet of the mountain disappeared. The sound of the eruption was heard 600 miles away. The air instantly heated to 600 degrees. Old Harry never heard a thing because a shock wave of energy traveling faster than the speed of sound radiated out from the blast. It was followed by a 50 foot tall wave of mud that flattened everything within 150 square miles. It destroyed enough trees to build 200,000

three bedroom homes. The eruption was followed by a cloud of ash that covered everything to a depth of fifty feet. They never found a trace of Harry, his cats, or his cabin. You have to wonder what went through Harry's mind in that millisecond before he realized he'd gambled and lost. He'd heard the warnings, but he blew them off. The Bible says that at any moment, Jesus could return in the twinkling of an eye. God has placed warning signs all along the road. *Warning, repent immediately.* Those who have heeded His warning will escape His judgement. Some though like Old Harry, just laugh at the Bible and refuse to heed God's warning. It will cost them everything.

Let me end with one last thought. I began today with King Hezekiah and his apathy about the next generation. Revelation 21:4 tells us that in heaven, God will wipe all tears from our eyes. Have you ever wondered what the tears are from? Apparently, it's not when we die. It's not at the Bema Seat when we give account for our faithfulness. Those things have all taken place much earlier. In the timeline the tears are wiped away after the Great White Throne Judgment when all of the lost, those who never committed their lives to Christ, are judged and cast into a Christless eternity. I wonder if God has to wipe away our tears then because we were witnesses at the Great White Throne and watched as our loved ones are judged and then cast into Hell.

I'd rather be a Carol Kent and have a child in prison than for one of them to spend a second in hell. For a moment picture your child, your grandchild.

*Do your children know Jesus? How about your grandchildren? Are you sure? We can't make someone else's decision to trust Christ, but we must share the gospel with them and pray for their salvation. Parents or grandparents often talk about that they have good children or grandchildren. None of that matters in eternity. The most important question is: *Do they know Jesus?**

Jesus is coming back. Are you ready? Please be ready! And as much as you can, make sure that those you love are ready, too.