

## THE SON OF MAN COMING WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY

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.”**

Every Sunday we recite the Apostles' Creed, which includes Jesus' incarnation, his birth, suffering, death, burial and resurrection, his ascension and his coming again. This is the gospel. Jesus' second coming is a very important part of the gospel message. Yet it is easy to avoid it because we don't want to think about the end of the world; we are very attached to it. On the other hand, it can be tempting to overemphasize Jesus' second coming as a kind of escape from present reality; this is caused by fear and anxiety as we live in this troubled world. Some students hope that Jesus will come before they have to pay back their school loans. But when Jesus comes he may say, "You should pay back your school loan." It is vital to have a right attitude toward Jesus' second coming. In today's passage Jesus speaks about his coming again with power and great glory. Let's listen to Jesus' teaching.

**First, signs of the end times and warnings (1-19).** The teaching in chapter 21 is given mainly to Jesus' disciples. They were not yet spiritually mature. They were still vulnerable to desire for human recognition and greed (20:45-47). Jesus helped them to see what was truly valuable in God's sight. In 21:1-4, as Jesus and his disciples were in the temple, he drew their attention to a great contrast between two types of offerings. There were thirteen collection chests in the temple with trumpet-like openings for the donations of worshipers. It seems that the rich were putting their offerings into the chests in a grandiose manner to draw attention to themselves. On the other hand, there was a poor widow. She was dressed in shabby, old clothes. She might have felt ashamed that her offering was so small. But overcoming her feelings, she offered two very small copper coins out of her love for God and thankfulness for his grace. She put her coins in the box as quietly as possible. Still, it made a clinking noise which indicated how little she gave. She might have been embarrassed and quickly exited.

Jesus quietly observed this scene. Then he used this chance to teach his disciples a lesson. He said, **“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their**

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**wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on”** (3-4). Jesus’ viewpoint makes a great contrast with the way people view things. People see the dollar amount, but Jesus sees the measure of sacrifice. People see the outer appearance, but Jesus sees the heart of the giver. People value relatively in comparison with others, but Jesus values absolutely based on the faith of the giver. The poor widow gave herself first of all to the Lord, then she gave all she had to the Lord in the midst of poverty. God loves those who offer in this way.

It seems like the disciples didn’t pay any attention to Jesus’ teaching. Some of them were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God (5). Indeed, the stones of the temple were impressive. They were massive, made of white marble. The largest was about 45 feet long, 11 feet wide, and 16 feet deep, and weighed almost 600 tons. In addition, many parts of the temple were covered with gold offered as a gift to God. When the sun shone on this temple, it was breathtaking. This temple was the crown of Jewish culture and the center of their nation. We can understand its attraction. However, Jesus had revealed the utter corruption of the temple when he cleansed it. The disciples should have had insight that pierced through the outer appearance to see the spiritual condition of their nation. They should have known how brokenhearted Jesus was for the people of Jerusalem. But their hearts were stolen by the glittering things of the world. How easy to be fascinated by politics, the Internet, entertainment, sports, and lose spiritual insight.

How did Jesus respond? Did he join them in admiring the temple? No, instead he said something so shocking that they probably never forgot it. He said, **“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). Jesus foretold the complete destruction of the Jerusalem temple. And indeed, it happened. In A.D. 70 the Roman general Titus invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the temple so completely that not one stone was left on another. Upon hearing Jesus’ words, the disciples were shocked. They asked, **“When will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?”** (7) In Luke’s account, they asked only about the destruction of the temple. Jesus not only answered their question, but he extended his response to cover the signs of the end of the age and his coming again. Jesus wants us to know that just as his prediction about the destruction of the

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temple happened—it is a fact in history—so his prediction about his second coming will also come true, just as he said. As we study verses 8-28 let's realize there is an intertwining of Jesus' predictions about the fall of the temple and his second coming. Mother Barry has said that this is like looking at a mountain range. In the same line of sight there is a mountain near and one further away. Through the lens of Jesus' predictions we see both of them at the same time.

In verses 8-19 we find both signs of the end of the age and warnings. Let's consider these signs and warnings. Look at verse 8. **“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.”** Throughout history many have claimed to be the Messiah: Simon Magus, Tanchelm of Antwerp, Ann Lee, who claimed to be the female incarnation of Christ, and more. In 1972, Lazlo Toth claimed he was Jesus Christ as he battered Michelangelo's pieta with a geologist's hammer. That is why Mary's arm, nose and eyelid are damaged. In hindsight, false messiahs look ridiculous. But they are indeed dangerous. The devil uses them to deceive vulnerable people by confidently projecting false hope that attracts the fearful and anxious. So, we should indeed watch out for them. If any human being claims to be the Messiah, they are lying. Do not follow them.

In verses 9-11 we find wars, uprisings, conflicts, and natural disasters such as earthquakes, famines and pestilences. Just recently, we have witnessed so many uprisings, such as the Arab Spring and ISIS, and wars in Crimea, Turkey, Venezuela, Libya. And that is just in the last few years. What about earthquakes? On average, magnitude 2 and smaller earthquakes occur several hundred times a day worldwide. Major earthquakes, magnitude 7, happen more than once a month; magnitude 8 and higher, occur about once a year.<sup>1</sup> Then there is famine. According to the United Nations, 21,000 people die of starvation every day.<sup>2</sup> Jesus said, **“These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away”** (9b). So we must live through many tragic events. How we respond when we hear about these fearful events makes a big difference. If we become frightened and doubt God's love, we can lose faith. For example, when Chuck Templeton saw an African woman holding her dead baby at her breast, looking upward with grief, he decided not

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.iris.edu/hq/inclass/fact-sheet/how\\_often\\_do\\_earthquakes\\_occur](https://www.iris.edu/hq/inclass/fact-sheet/how_often_do_earthquakes_occur)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.poverty.com/>

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to believe in God, and became skeptical and dark. On the other hand, when we hold firm in faith, God uses tragedies to purify our faith and hope in the kingdom of God (1Pe 1:7). The prophet Daniel kept his faith through the Babylonian invasion, grew in wisdom and insight and foresaw the Messiah and God's kingdom.

After giving some general signs in verses 8-11, Jesus speaks directly to his disciples in verses 12-19. They would be persecuted, and even put in prison because of Jesus' name (11-12). This persecution comes from religious and political sources, as well as through close relationships. The disciples would be betrayed even by their parents, brothers and sisters, and friends (16a). It would be so severe that some of them would be put to death, and so widespread that everyone would hate them because of Jesus (16b-17). Most leaders promise to make their followers' lives better. But Jesus warned his disciples that they would face unbearable persecution because of him, and even die. Is it worth it to be persecuted and even die for Jesus? Can you do that? D.L. Moody prayed a lot about this and finally concluded that if Jesus asked him to die as a martyr, Jesus would give him the grace to do so. Actually, we don't need to worry about it. If we face that moment, the Holy Spirit enables us to overcome it.

This persecution does not come because of our sins, but because of our faith. What is the meaning of such persecution? Jesus said, **“And so you will bear testimony to me”** (13). Historically, when Stephen was martyred, persecution broke out against the early church. All believers who scattered preached the word and many people believed in Jesus (Ac 8:1-4). In this way, the gospel spread rapidly to all Judea and Samaria, to Antioch, and to the Roman world (Ac 11:19-21). Persecution is not bad. God works for good through persecution to spread the good news through the testimony of his people. During persecution, there is a danger that we will worry about how to defend ourselves (14a). We may want to prepare our answers and rehearse. Yet this cannot solve our worry problem. Jesus said, **“make up your minds not to worry. I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict”** (14b-15). Jesus also promised **“not a hair of your head will perish”** (18). Our lives are not in other people's hands, but in God's hands. God empowers us to testify about Jesus amid persecution.

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Jesus encourages us, “**Stand firm...**” (19). To “stand firm” is also translated “endure.” It means to continue to bear up under persecution. In America, we hardly understand what this means. But throughout the world, Christians are being severely persecuted for their faith in Christ. It is estimated that in North Korea, 30,000 Christians are in deadly work camps. They face the threat of death every day. Yet they keep their faith. Shafia, a Christian Pakistani woman was arrested and imprisoned for her faith.<sup>3</sup> Her family members had to work as slaves to earn money for her release. But she never denied her faith in Christ and found peace. Jesus promised, “**Stand firm, and you will win life.**” Whatever our situation, when we keep our faith and endure to the end, we have eternal life. Eternal life is worthy of any suffering we go through in this world.

**Second, people will see the Son of Man coming (20-38).** In verses 20-24, Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem. A few days earlier, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he wept over it. It was because the city would be punished for not recognizing the time of God’s coming to them (19:41-44). Jesus foretold that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies (20). At that time, they should flee (21). It was a time of harsh punishment for their sin of rejecting the Messiah (22). Many people would die and many others would be taken prisoner (24a). Indeed, this happened. According to the historian Josephus, more than 1,100,000 people died and 97,000 were carried off into slavery. As Jesus foretold, Jerusalem has been trampled on by the Gentiles, and this will continue until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (24b).

After predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus expanded his scope to describe the signs that would precede his coming again. Jesus said, “**There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea**” (25). These are not local signs, but cosmic signs that cause irreversible destruction. When these signs happen, it means the end has come. Luke only mentions the sun, moon and stars. But Matthew and Mark state more explicitly what will happen to them: “**the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken**” (Mt 24:29; Mk 13:24-25). When the sun is darkened, earth’s source of light, heat and energy is gone. Imagine a world like this with no light, no

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVrNU60EocE>

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heat, no energy. It would be utterly dark, extremely cold, without food. Nothing could survive, not even bacteria. Of course, the moon has no light to give without the sun. The stars have been so constant for thousands of years that we could chart their movement well in advance. But the stars will fall from the sky, like leaves from a tree in a hurricane. The sea will be totally out of control, roaring and tossing. Its chaotic power will wash away vast regions in a moment. I was told that in 1948, the Columbia and Willamette rivers of Oregon flooded disastrously. Water broke through a levy system and entered the city of Vanport. Though it was the second largest city in the state, it disappeared completely in one day.<sup>4</sup> But this is mild compared to what will happen at the end of the age. At that time, people will faint from terror. There will be no value in money, diplomas, social status, science or politics. All the technology people brag about will be useless. There is no hope in the world. But there is hope in Jesus!

Look at verse 27. **“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”** When Jesus came into the world the first time, he was quiet and humble. He was born as a baby and laid in a manger. He was despised, rejected and at the end, even crucified. After he died, people thought they would never see him again. But by the power of God he was raised from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God. And he will come again. This time, he will come in power and great glory. Paul says, **“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God...”** (1Th 4:16). He will come with thousands upon thousands of his holy angels (Jude 14). He will send his angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Mt 24:31). He will open the book of life and call his people’s names one by one, and we will respond with a sense of victory. Jesus will give us a crown of righteousness, glory and life, and we will be with Jesus forever. What a glorious event! This is the hope of believers. This hope will not disappoint us. This hope gives us inner strength to endure all kinds of hardships while we live in this world. Sometimes we think believing in Jesus does not matter so much. But at that moment, believing in Jesus is everything.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/vanport-oregon-how-countrys-largest-housing-project-vanished-day-180954040/>

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When we see these signs, what should we do? Jesus said, “**...stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near**” (28). For various reasons, we go around with our heads down. But Jesus urges us, “**...stand up, lift up your heads...**” When we have Jesus’ hope in our hearts, even in the midst of trouble and hardship, we can live with a sense of victory in this world.

In conclusion Jesus tells a parable and gives some final warnings. The parable of the fig tree and all the trees indicate that when we see sprouting leaves we know that summer is near (30). Likewise, when we see the signs of the end of the age we know that the kingdom of God is near (31). Jesus assures us that his words will surely come true (32). Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus’ words will never pass away (33). Jesus wants us to be spiritually alert. Jesus said, “**Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth**” (34-35). We don’t know when Jesus will come, or when we will go to Jesus. Jesus told us, “**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**” (36).

Even though Jesus was about to be arrested, suffer and die, he spent his days teaching at the temple, and his nights in prayer on the Mount of Olives, and many people came to listen to his teaching (37-38).

The world is getting more chaotic as we near the end of the age. There is no hope in the world. But there is hope in Jesus. Jesus will come again in power and great glory. Let’s hope in Jesus and live with a sense of victory.