

Anticipating Christ's Return

Luke 21:25-28

September 29, 2024

You can turn in your Bibles to Luke 21 as we return to our study of Luke's Gospel, Luke 21. I'm going to start reading in verse 20; Luke 21, verse 20. You can follow along as I read. Jesus says to his disciples on Mount Olivet, this Olivet discourse, he says, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is at hand. And then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the countryside must not enter the city.

"Because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. Woe to those who are pregnant and those who are nursing babies in those days, for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and will be

led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Then there will be signs in sun and moon and stars.”

Right there at that point, I'm stopping there for a moment to see that particular word. “‘There will be signs in sun and moon and stars.’” And it's at that word that Jesus picks up where he left off at the end of verse 11, when he said back in verse 11, end of verse 11, he said, “‘There will be terrors and great signs from heaven.’”

Signs is the connecting word, signs, is the connecting thought. And Jesus stopped at that point in verse 11, speaking about terrors and great, great signs from heaven, to show his disciples what they could expect in the build-up to the times of the Gentiles, which would commence with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Now that that's been covered, he picks up where he left off, speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem, times of the

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Gentiles, he speaks up where he left off in verse 11 to reveal what will happen after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

So back to verse 25, “There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anguish among nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear in the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world. For the powers of the heavens be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up, lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

When the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, the signs that precede Christ's return will begin, and these signs will be unmistakable, undeniable. They will be worldwide. They will be perceived by humanity in one of two ways: either, on the one hand, abject terror among the unbelieving of the nations, or on the other hand, elation among the believing, the recently repentant nation of Israel, at that time recently repentant, and any Gentiles who join themselves to Israel.

So those two reactions to seeing the signs, and those reactions of the inhabited world at that time, frame the text that's before us. They also frame, by the way, how we, each one of us, anticipates Christ's return. So as we enter into this text, what about you? How are you anticipating Christ's return? Do you anticipate it with excited joy, with elation, with eager expectation, or with something less than that?

Most people, I think I can safely say without doing a survey of every single person on the earth, but most people, I have found, they are indifferent toward Christ's return if they think about it at all. They're sort of thoughtless about the Second Coming.

I remember one time as a young believer, I had recently exited the military, and I was sitting around with some of my former military buddies with their wives or girlfriends or whatever. We're sitting around dinner, and there was a very quick way to shut down the conversation, by talking about the entire plan of the Bible from start to finish, ending with the Second Coming of Christ.

As I waxed poetic of all that I'd been learning from the Bible, told them about the return of Christ and his judgment and all that was about to happen, they all kind of shifted nervously in their seats, kind of adjusted water glasses and such. And one person said, I think I need to go to the bathroom, and the other said, Well, so. And they moved on. They were tolerant, I suppose, of my strange views, but they did not share my views at all.

If the unbelieving think about the Second Coming of Christ at all, even if they go down the track a little bit in their minds, as if it were true to them, they would see the return of Christ to be something of an imposition, an interruption to their life and their plans. Some express, going down that track, express even resentment, like, who does he think he is? Others even express, and increasingly I hear this, this shocking blasphemy. I've seen it on a T-shirt: If Jesus comes back, we'll kill him again.

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Obviously, that's not the believing heart. The believing heart is full of joyful anticipation, profound longing of a hope that is as yet unfulfilled, a hope that we have in his return, the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have a zealous love and a desire to see him face to face, to fall down and worship at his feet.

The judgment of unbelievers, which ranges from blasphemy to indifference, their judgment, their, their poor judgment of our Savior and of his coming and of his plan, not only hurts us, hurts our hearts, but it really causes indignation to burn in our hearts. Righteous anger.

Sitting around that table at that dinner with my friends, I felt that. A little bit of hurt, but more, How dare you move on? What's more important? Those of us who are chosen from before the world began, who were set apart by God in Christ, who've been born again by the Spirit of God, those of us who have repented and are repenting of our sins, who believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, those of us who are covered in his

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righteousness, we're those who, along with Paul, love his appearing.

We long for it with a deep longing, so much that we ache for it. Romans 8 describes it as a, groaning, that we have inside of us. I'm sure you feel it. We're like the Thessalonian believers who are waiting for the Son of God to return. According to 1 Thessalonians 1:10, we're waiting for Jesus Christ, "the one who rescues us from the wrath to come."

With all the saints we cry out along with Paul, "Maranatha! Our Lord, come!" Every headline I see, I'm like, Come already! Every disobedience that I see, I'm like, God, how long will you wait? How long will you withhold your judgment? How long before you send Christ to be marveled at among all those who believe, that all of our faith is at that moment vindicated, but also justice and retribution comes?

And I know that I don't have, when I say that, I don't have his full purpose in mind because any delay, seeming delay, as Peter says, any seeming delay, 2 Peter 3, is for the sake of

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those elect who yet remain to be awakened to their salvation. No, any premature coming of Jesus Christ and those people are not saved, I want them all to come into the faith.

So we don't regard the patience of God as negligence, as forgetfulness, as indifference. No, he has a plan. His plan is perfect. I trust it. But I long for his appearing. I know you do, too.

Two ways, then, to anticipate Christ's return, which is what this text really makes clear to us. Two ways to anticipate his return, and here's the first way. For those who do not love his appearing, for those who don't long for his appearing, who don't, who, those who do not order their lives in light of his return, those who are indifferent, there is, number one, if you want to write this down as an outline point, number one, a certain expectation of judgment, a certain expectation of judgment.

That is certainly what we see in the text. As the Gospel goes forth, the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ spreads out

to every place, to every single person, among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. And to the one, the knowledge of Christ is a fragrance of Christ, and it is as the stench of death to them. They don't react well. It hits their nostrils and they are, they recoil, they're repelled by it, they turn away from it.

But to the other, the fragrance of Christ is the sweet smell of life itself, and the more we breathe it in, the more life that we enjoy and learn and understand. We love the knowledge of Christ. But for many, it's not their experience.

During this long age that Jesus has identified in verse 24 as "the times the Gentiles," we know that during this time, from Mark's account of the Olivet Discourse, that the Gospel is going to be preached to all the nations, Mark 13:10. Prior to the Second Coming, prior to the abomination of desolation in the temple, prior to the start of the Tribulation, prior to the rapture of the church, the Gospel will be preached to all the nations.

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There are more and more Christian scholars who see that what Jesus said in Mark 13:10 about the Gospel spreading out to all the nations, that's near its fulfillment in our time, especially since the advent of the Internet. Brian Devries is a, Brian Devries is a church planter, missiologist. He says this, quote, "Most of the world has already heard about Jesus and has either rejected the biblical truth or more commonly, has learned an adulterated notion of the truth." End quote.

We find this as the prosperity gospel is the gospel that many people are familiar with around the world, especially in Africa. So, yeah, we've exported from this country an adulterated form of the truth and a misunderstanding of Jesus. But they have heard his name and they have enough to go and advance their learning by doing some more investigation.

But I'll tell you what, that's why missions today, modern missions, has to focus on establishing sound, strong, healthy churches led by elders, fed by expository preaching, so that doctrinal clarity in every land around the earth can separate fact from fiction, can put the manifold wisdom of God on display

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in the church, give them a pure, clear understanding of Jesus Christ.

As more and more people hear and understand the Gospel, as they take sides about Christ, falling on either one side or the other of the dividing line, either for Christ or against Christ, they take on one of two roles which we talked about last week.

As Gentiles, we either become tools of domination over the Jews, or we become heralds of true salvation. Having received the salvation from their Messiah, we then turn around and proclaim it to them.

So all the nations are being called even now, every soul is being called to his or her own verdict about Jesus, just as the Jews had to do. Every soul must answer the same question that Jesus put to his own disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" That's the question. The answer to that question marks the difference between life and death, heaven and hell, blessing and cursing, eternal salvation or eternal damnation.

Now, as we think about the text before us, let me just orient you a bit to the text, so you know where we are in the timeline of future events. If you notice in the text after verse 24, "the times the Gentiles," that, once that is fulfilled, that crosses a fulcrum in the text. That's a hinge point.

Then Jesus says in verse 25, "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars." As I told you, he's picking up from where he left off in verse 11 about terror and great signs from heaven, because Jesus, in that section, verses 8-11, had just described the first half of the great Tribulation.

Go back there to Luke 21:8. He said, "See to it that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name saying, 'I am he.'" Who is that? The Christ. They'll be saying that they themselves are the Christ of God. They are the Messiah. "For many will come in my name saying, 'I am He,'" in the times at hand. Don't go after them.

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“And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately.” And then he continues saying to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”

As we've learned in our past study, everything there up to the “terrors and great signs from heaven,” everything up to that point, those things happen in the first half of the great Tribulation. As we've seen before, this is the time of what's kind of spoken about in kind of contemporary culture as the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse.” You've probably heard that expression.

But that comes from Scripture, four horsemen of the Apocalypse. It's introduced in Zechariah 1:7-11. It's elaborated on in Revelation 6:1-11. This is that time. It's after the rapture of the church. The rapture of the church is the mystery

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that Jesus alluded to in John 14, and Paul was privileged to unveil it in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15.

Christ returns at that time to, in the clouds, to retrieve his bride, 1 Thessalonians 4:17. That's us, that's the church. He takes her to his Father's house, John 14:3, never to be parted again. All who remain on the earth after the rapture, at that moment, both Jews and Gentiles, all in that moment will be unbelieving once the rapture happens. All who are left on the earth after that event are hostile to God, hostile to his Christ, wide open in their hearts and their minds to embrace lies.

And at that time, it's a pretty cataclysmic event to remove us all, they'll be looking for answers, and they'll be finding them in the doctrine of demons. They'll be susceptible to every error, listening to false prophets, following false Christs.

Most of the world is going to unite under that, at that time, under a single leader. It's what we read earlier in 2 Thessalonians 2, "the man of lawlessness." They'll find him to

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be a compelling, captivating, charismatic, strong, powerful leader. We're seeing in our own time how, in the absence of good leadership, we're all longing for leadership, clear authority, compelling.

Well, at this time he'll be produced, this one who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the sanctuary of God in the temple, exhibiting himself as being God. This is what Revelation 13 reveals as the Antichrist, the one who leads the world in apostasy, who calls the world, the entire world, to worship him. That apostasy is going to be enforced such that all who don't bow the knee to Antichrist at that time, they will be penalized, they will be punished, pursued.

At the same time that that's happening, during the rise of the Antichrist in the first half of the great Tribulation, though the church has been removed from the earth, its witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, like a seed planted in soil, starts bearing fruit at that time.

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God will have prepared the soil, softening the hearts of the Jews. As that long season of desolation called "the times of the Gentiles" and its domination over the Jews, as that draws to a close in the Tribulation, God is going to use the witness of the raptured Gentile Church, seeds that have been sown for 2,000 years, now, and running, to bring the nation of Israel to repentance. They will look at that time upon Jesus, the one whom they have pierced, Zechariah 12:10. They'll weep bitterly over him, regretting their nation's rejection of their own Messiah, and they will at that time trust him for their full salvation.

But right before they do that, as a prelude, really, to Israel's national repentance, God prepares the heavens and the earth and the inhabitants of the earth for the return of the King, the return of Jesus Christ. Verse 25 again, "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear in the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

In that section, Jesus shows his men the convulsions of heaven and earth, which are the signs of his return. He lets them see through prophetic foresight and vision, the unbelieving nations at that time who are reacting to these terrifying signs, and several things to see, here. We see something in the heavens, on the, on the earth, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

First, in the heavens. Jesus says, "The powers of the heavens will be shaken." That's, these are "the signs in sun and moon and stars," namely that they are shaken. *Saleuo* is the verb: rocked back and forth, shaken to and fro, kind of a shuddering, a shaking going on. What does that mean?

When we think about the light-bearing bodies in the heavens, what does that mean for them? It means that they'll fail to do their job in some measure. God created all these light-bearing bodies on day four of creation week to separate day from night, Genesis 1:14. He created them for signs, seasons, to mark days, years. Sun governs the day, the moon

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governs the night, Genesis 1:17. Separate light from darkness, Genesis 1:18.

None of that is going to be effectively working well right before Christ returns. At that time, physically on the earth, darkness reigns. Earth's physical environment will become a visible sign of the spiritual atmosphere of the whole world. In a time like that, always darkish, time stands still. Days blur together in this kind of unending night. All of it's a sign of horror to signal the certain doom that's coming.

This is what Jesus revealed to John in the Revelation, Revelation 6:12-13, portrayed there as the opening of the sixth seal. "There was a great earthquake, the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind."

It's a different word, there for, shaken, as Jesus uses in Luke 21. But it's the same concept. In fact, the verb there, *seio*, is more violent than the verb in Luke 21:26. It means,

seio, means to cause violent disturbance. It's kind of what happens, it's the same word used in Hebrews 12:26, speaking about what happened at Mount Sinai when God descended on that mountain in thunder and fire and a trumpet blast. That's what's happening in the heavens at this time. When you say, Is that literal? Yeah. Was Sinai literal? Yeah, same words.

Second, the effect. That's what's happening in the heavens. Look at the effect on the earth, number two, verse 25. When we see happening on the earth, the nations are in dismay and in perplexity. Why? Because of the roaring of the sea and the waves. The roaring of the sea and the waves.

Now, whether that's an effect of cosmic disturbances, which makes sense, I mean, the moon does govern the tides, doesn't it? So if that's, if that's all going dark, and something's wrong with a light projection here on earth, is that, does that not make sense that something's going to happen to the waters? We're not told exactly what cause and effect is, but it does make sense that changes in the sun and the moon cause the earth to convulse and the seas to pitch back and forth.

And two, the word is roar. It's a deafening sound. Add to that, Revelation 6:13 says, "The stars of the sky are falling to earth." The word there for stars, *aster*, has a general meaning. It, it can refer to a heavenly body other than the sun, such as a meteor or comet. That's the use here. So it can either refer to like falling stars, meteors, comets. It can also refer to literal stars. But here in the context, it's talking about a meteor shower, but on an unprecedented scale and happening worldwide.

In that period of darkness, as all the lights are going out, we're going to see we, we're going to see it from a different perspective. They will see, they will see stars falling, and I'm telling you, lighting up the sky like fireworks. Nothing that they're going to "ooh" and "aah" over. They'll be terrified over it.

Revelation 6:14 adds, "At that time the sky was split apart like a scroll when it's rolled up, and every mountain and island moved out of their places." Man, this is major tectonic

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activity, set in motion by the sky falling as coordinated events of divine attack to the earth. And this is only, by the way, the prelude to judgment.

Jesus tells us, third, what happens among the nations, how the people on earth react to all that they're seeing and experiencing. Notice in the text, don't picture or imagine at all any giddy science teachers taking their students outside to get us a glimpse of a solar eclipse.

This is sheer terror. Verse 25 talks about dismay or anguish among the nations. Same word as I mentioned last week, same word there, *ethnos*, from verse 24. There in verse 24 it's translated, Gentiles to contrast them with the Jews.

So the Gentile nations, having for two millennia, now trampled and terrified the Jews for two millennia, now the roles are reversed. Now they're on the run. Now they're the ones cowering. They're the ones in dismay and in anguish. God revisits upon them the terror that they've visited upon Israel.

The word, there, to be in dismay or anguish, literally it's a, it's a word that means to be locked up, hemmed in, enclosed. One lexicographer puts it this way. He says, it's the stress that comes from, quote, "a sense of being confined in circumstances that seem to offer little hope of escape." That's this.

Imagine for yourself the worst claustrophobic feeling that you've ever had. Sometimes it can be kind of figuratively speaking, metaphorically speaking, you're trapped in a situation you can't get out of. You're trapped in a, there's a relational problem, and you'd like to escape the difficulty, but you can't get out of it. You must deal with it. You're trapped in a work situation that is going nowhere good. It's going to be crashing over a cliff, and you are now trapped along for the ride because of your role in the company.

Or imagine just a claustrophobic feeling. Anybody who's been spelunking or caving and crawling through little wormholes underneath a massive mountain, and you get to that place where

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you're stuck. It's pitch black, it's cold, and all you can think about is a mountain crushing you like a grape. And no one knows. No one can hear your "ah!"

That's the feeling here at this time. Even in wide open spaces, that's the feeling. Being trapped, stuck, straight-jacketed during this cataclysmic earthquake, the likes of which the world has never seen, under a sky that's literally coming down around you. Meteor shower of, well, biblical proportions. I mean, how do you say it?

Leaving your country and moving to another one, not an option. Any hope of escape by sea is met with the roaring of the seas. That's a word that's used to describe a powerful, piercing blast of a trumpet. Seas are angry seas, surging, tossing, encroaching the boundaries of land to terrorize those who live in coastal cities. Every time a hurricane rolls through Florida, we see footage of all that surge and swelling.

But that's mild compared to what's spoken of, here. Humanity, therefore, is hemmed in, held fast, locked in place,

unable to escape as they are pummeled over and over by what is, again, we need to remind ourselves that this is only a prelude to Christ's return. This is just preparatory signs letting them know judgment's coming.

And again, this is happening worldwide. The use of the word *oukoumene* makes that clear. The word *oukoumene* refers to a place of habitation by mankind. Sometimes it will refer to a local, regional or, or territorial habitation. Here in context, Jesus is speaking of the entire inhabited world, all mankind in every place on the planet.

Why is that? Because the failing of the sun, the moon, and the stars doesn't just happen in Iowa. It happens from New York to New Delhi and everywhere in between. North Pole to South Pole; everywhere, people are seeing this. This feeling of being trapped with nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, leaves men fainting from fear as they are in dread about what's going to happen next.

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Rich and poor, great and small, everyone living on the planet shares the same experience of utter terror, just weak in the knees and about to fall over from fear, faint-hearted, their, their heart melting like wax, hopeless, utterly dismayed.

Thanks to Revelation 6:15, we get an insight into what they're thinking at that time. John writes that the kings of the earth, "then the kings of the earth, and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us, hide us from the presence of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"

Wow! That is evidence of theology being taught at that time. They know what's falling upon them. The church has been raptured, but there is still Gospel witness through the church's legacy, its teaching, its recordings, its written words, and the Bible.

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And as people start repenting, seeing what's happening and repenting, they start teaching, they start proclaiming. They get very active in their evangelism. They're not fearful of anybody's poor opinion of them. They don't have any fear of man at that time. They have fear of God, these evangelists, as they come to Christ. They're telling everybody who sits on the throne, who the Lamb is, and what wrath he's bringing and when that great day of wrath is going to come, no one's going to be able to stand before it.

You know what? These people, hard as they seem to the Gospel, you know what? They're listening. Their conscience is informed, their mind is instructed. And in that great day, the only thing they don't do with that theology is repent.

Let me interject at this point just to let you know that there are those who believe that this great tale I've just told you belongs in the Christian fiction section of your local bookstore, that this is just fantastical stuff, quaint, rather silly in light of more serious scholarship on eschatology.

There are those who, when they come to eschatology and they read about these signs of cosmic disturbances, seem to go to very great lengths to explain away the clear and unmistakable meaning of the text.

There's one commentator I read and I respect very much. I use his commentary. But he says this, "Figurative language of this, of this kind is common in the prophets." That's how he responds to this. That's his comment. "Figurative language of this kind is common in the prophets," and then he provides a list of examples from the Old Testament. He gives no further explanation.

So I chose to work through every one of the examples that he gave, seven of them, to see if, indeed, we should just take Jesus speaking about signs in sun, moon and stars and on the earth, anguish among nations and the roaring of the sea in the waves and men fainting and all, if we should just take that as figurative language, these are metaphors not to be taken literally, that's not literally going to happen.

So I went through every text that he provided, there, to see if we should take Jesus figuratively, here. In several cases, the biblical author that he cites gives literary clues in the text that point to a figurative interpretation. They use the word, like or as, to signal to the reader, this is simile, this is metaphor.

Jesus does not do that, here. There's no indication in his language that he means anybody to take him anything but literally. In some of the cases, the passages that this author cited were clearly not judgment context at all. He cites poetic texts which were intended by the author to be read as poetic, start to finish. It's not the case in the Olivet Discourse. It's historical teaching, it's future history. Three important cases that he gives, what this author cites as figures of speech, are not even figurative at all. They're literal, provides counter-evidence that undermines his own point.

Seven examples. If you're just reading through a commentary and you think, well, this should be taken as figurative, and you don't know any better, you could be intimidated by that kind of

language from scholarship. Seven examples suggesting that Jesus uses figurative language, here, "as is common in the prophets," as he says, all seven of those examples are nothing but red herrings, dead-ends, distractions.

One amillennial author, that is to say, he, he's inclined to not believe in a future literal millennial thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. He believes either we're in the Millennium, or it's a, a period afterwards.

But he says rather candidly on this text, quote, "The total picture is, indeed, very vivid," for which he draws this valid, reasonable inference about the darkening of the sun and moon. He says, quote, "Since sun and moon exert a potent influence on our planet, think, for example, about the moon and the tides, it is not surprising that the sea also is deeply disturbed." End quote.

Then he says this, "Until this prophetic panorama becomes history, we shall probably not know how much of this description must be taken literally and how much figuratively. That at least

some of it must be taken literally is clear from 2 Peter 3:10, which speaks about the destruction of heaven and earth by fire.” End quote.

Another commentator who interprets Luke 21:20-24 about the destruction of Jerusalem, just as we have, he argues for the literal, plain reading of that text. He understands Jesus, just as we do, as predicting the literal destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

But when he comes to verses 25-26 about signs and sun and moon and stars, about disturbances in the sea, about powers of the heavens shaken, all of a sudden he insists that we must read these verses as figures of speech, that Jesus is not predicting literal events.

So he reads, he cites verses 26, 25 and 26, and then he writes this, “That portion of Scripture employs such strong and vivid language that many think it be, could be descriptive of nothing else than the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ.” Count me guilty as charged.

Then he goes on to say, "These descriptive terms would seem to indicate a catastrophic end of the earth." Again, I say, "Amen." "Yet when this passage is studied in the light of prophetic language and pronouncements, it can readily be that it is descriptive of the passing away of Judaism."

Now, if you're scratching your head at that, you're getting the point. Jesus, here using metaphors to describe the passing away of Judaism? And then he continues. He says, "We must remember that an apocalyptic language existed that was well-known to the discerning reader of the Old Testament Scripture."

What he's saying is there is a code book that discerning readers of the Old Testament used, and it had apocalyptic, and said apocalyptic texts use this. These are a different set of rules. That's what he's saying.

So he says, "We would naturally expect the traditional, frezolo, phraseology," and in this author's mind, apocalyptic

language, use of symbols, figures and metaphors in this code book on how we need to interpret those things, "we would naturally expect this traditional phraseology would be used to describe the eclipse of the Old Testament dispensation." End quote.

And the author goes on trying to convince his readers of how natural it is, how, just how matter of fact it is to go from a literal reading of the verses immediately previous, verses 20-24, to switch to a figurative reading of verses 20-25 without any warning. He is, shall we say, unconvincing.

Are we really to picture Jesus, here, sitting on the Mount of Olives, scaring the wits out of his disciples about the coming desolation of Jerusalem and the domination of the Gentiles using literal language, only to switch it up without any warning and start using metaphors, figures of speech, apocalyptic codebooks to describe the eclipse of the Old Testament dispensation?

Not how the Good Shepherd speaks, with a voice of obscurity. He doesn't obfuscate the truth. As they hear of the trouble of their nation that all that their people are going to face, the trouble for future generations, their hearts are upset at that. Wouldn't yours if you found out your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren are going to be destroyed in the city of Jerusalem if they don't leave, and your nation's going to be under domination for centuries?

They don't need figures of speech at that point. They need plain-spoken, straightforward language as they anticipate a future of Gentiles trampling their beloved nation. Jesus is here speaking a word of comfort to them. He's promising his return to rescue, to restore. And he uses very literal, plain, clear language, straightforward, speaking to their hearts.

The figures of speech predicted by the prophets, using prophetic language, warning of the judgments that have fallen the Jews, as we've seen, they've all been fulfilled literally. Any prediction that used any metaphor in the past, as we see from history, the historic reality of what actually happened was

far worse. So gruesome. There's a sense in which the metaphor was like veiling some things for them, so it, it's like a euphemism.

So always, beloved, as you read through your Bibles, keep in mind the golden rule of interpretation of the Bible. When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense lest it result in nonsense.

I'm not making fun of that commentator, by the way. Any commentator that is, you know, is a, is a good commentator trying to wrestle with the issue of the text, I'm not making fun. I do want to warn, though, and point out the arbitrariness of some biblical interpretation.

There's no logically consistent justification to choose to see verses 25-26 as Jesus speaking in metaphors when he's spoken literally right before that, verses 20-24, and in verse 27, by the way. I mean, why not treat verses 20-24 as a metaphor? Oh, that's right, because it happened literally, and it stands forever as an inflexible fact of history.

Doesn't the fulfillment of that fact that this prediction right here teaches us how to interpret the next verses as well? Doesn't it give us confidence to interpret literally not only the signs, the prelude to Christ's coming, but verse 27 as well, the return of the Son of Man coming in a cloud? I mean, is that literal?

It's not just a matter of hermeneutical consistency, here. This commentator's view makes utter nonsense of the text. Are we really to believe that Gentile nations are in total dismay and perplexity in verse 25, fainting from fear and this terrifying expectation, verse 26, over what he calls "the passing away of Judaism"?

Do kings and great men and commanders, do the rich, the strong, the slave, the free, do they all hide themselves in caves and call upon the rocks and the mountains to crush and bury them to escape all these falling metaphors that illustrate the eclipse of the Old Testament dispensation? Obviously, that's ludicrous. Let's be real.

Do not let anyone intimidate you or make you feel silly because you believe what you read. You have got it right. Your eyes are not deceiving you. You have just cause for believing what your eyes are reading on the pages of Scripture, and the burden of proof is on anyone who says otherwise.

And all that, verses 25-26, merely a prelude to the Second Coming of our Savior. Look at verse 27, "And then they will see." I love Jesus' use of verbs, here. "There will be signs." "There will be," and verse 27, "and they will see." He's just future indicative. It's happening.

It's a pronouncement, and anything else that Jesus said and was fulfilled in his life about his life, about anything, gives us confidence to believe what he says about the future. So when he uses the future tense in the indicative mood, just telling you the truth, bank on it.

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"They will see." Who's the, they, in that sentence? The nations. "They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." That cloud is not a figure of speech. It's something quite literal, quite visible. And it happens not once at the end, but twice.

The first time that Jesus returns in the clouds, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, he's coming for us. He's coming for the church. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, and then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them." Where? "In the clouds."

Does Jesus return to earth, there? Does he set his feet on the planet? No. "We will meet them in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

It's exactly what was predicted at his ascension. At his ascension "a cloud received him out of their sight," Acts 1:9, something literal, something visible. They're all looking at it.

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And "at his return, as the angels promised," two verses later, "this Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way as you've watched him go into heaven." His ascension and return: both literal, both visible.

So we, the church, will meet the Lord in the air, not on the earth, but in the air, and return to heaven during the seven-year tribulation called the Great Tribulation. There we will participate in the marriage ceremony of the Lamb to the Bride of Christ, his church, according to Revelation 19:7-8. There we will be "clothed in fine linen, bright and clean, which is the righteous acts of the saints."

And then at the end of the great Tribulation on earth, at the end of that time, we return to the earth with Christ. If you want to see this, you can turn to Revelation 19 and see it for yourself, the great Tribulation on the earth, we return to the earth with Christ.

Revelation 19:9 says, "For the marriage supper of the Lamb." So the marriage ceremony then is followed by a marriage

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supper. It's a week in, in Jewish times, in first-century times, it's like a week long of feasting. Comes back for the marriage supper of the Lamb, and we, when we come back with him, will be clothed in fine white wedding garments.

And this is the second time that Jesus returns in a cloud. The second time, though, he will descend all the way down to earth. And this is what John wrote about at the beginning of Revelation, Revelation 1:7, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him. Even so, amen."

Everyone at that time, Jew, Gentile, will behold his appearing. When he comes again, the saints of the church will return with him. Look at Revelation 19 verses 11 and following. "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sits on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, having a name written on him which no one

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knows except himself, and being clothed with a garment dipped in blood. His name is also called the Word of God.”

And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, they've just come from the marriage ceremony. No worry about getting their garments dirty because they don't do the fighting. They're following him on white horses.

“And from his mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it he may strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.” So he enters into his millennial kingdom. He'll rule them with a rod of iron. He's going to “tread the winepress of the wrath of the rage of God the Almighty. And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name written ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords.’”

That is what Jesus means when he says in Luke 21:27, “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” What John sees in Revelation 19, beloved, that is power, divine power. That is glory, divine glory, you might say Shekinah glory. That's what the Gentiles are going to experience

during the prelude to Christ's return in darkness is pierced by this light.

What about the Jews? What about the Jews at this time? Point number two, we talked about a certain, point number one, a certain expectation of judgment. Here's a certain expectation of fulfillment, a certain expectation of fulfillment.

I didn't mention it earlier, but it's important to talk about it now. When, when Jesus refers to himself in the third person in verse 27, refers to himself as, the Son of Man, that title has massive prophetic significance for the disciples as they hear echoes of the night visions of Daniel.

In Daniel 7:13-14, Daniel "saw coming with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man. He came up to the Ancient of Days and came near him, and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples and the nations and men of every tongue might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not be taken away, and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

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The disciples here in verse 27 are tracking with him perfectly, and the connection that he makes in verse 28, they're ready to receive it, that "when these things begin to take place, straighten up, lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near." It's happening right now.

That command to straighten up, lift up your heads, we take them as words of comfort for sure. That's what they are. David says in Psalm 3, "O Lord, how my adversaries have increased. Many are rising up against me, and many are saying of my soul, 'There's no salvation for him from God.' But you, O Yahweh, are a shield about me, my glory, the one who lifts up my head."

Yes, these are words of comfort, Straighten up, lift up your heads, be comforted. Yes, they're worthy of being cross-stitched on a pillow, framed in a wall hanging, whatever you like to do.

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But the point, here, in this context, goes beyond mere comfort, though comfort is vital. This is an announcement of the consummation of his total triumph, a total, complete victory over his enemies.

David goes on to say in Psalm 3, "Yahweh, you're a shield about me. You're my glory. You're the one who lifts my head. And so I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people." He's not numbering them like it's just thousands. That's just a myriad of people, an unaccountable number, even, "who all around have set themselves against me. "Arise, O Yahweh, save me, O my God, for you have struck all my enemies on the cheek. You've shattered the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to Yahweh. Your blessing be upon your people." That's David speaking as a representative head over his nation.

And you know what? That's the voice that Jesus uses here, the voice of his father David. He speaks here as the Son of Man, representative head over his nation, that he's the Messiah, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. He's coming back to mop up the

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earth, to cleanse the planet from the ungodly, and he will do so as Israel is entering its most desperate hour.

The waxing of the Gentile domination is going to have reached its zenith under the leadership of the Antichrist. The covenant that he makes with Israel, he's going to break that covenant at the midpoint of the Tribulation. He's going to turn on Israel and prosecute a ruthless campaign of genocide. It is the final solution of final solutions.

But then when things look hopeless for Israel, that's the time to remember God's plan as written in Zechariah 14:12-13, where he says, "Indeed, I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle." Think David speaking, "Even though I'm surrounded by ten thousands of armies," that's this, "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle." And skipping ahead to Zechariah 14:3, "Then Yahweh, Yahweh will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle."

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As we saw, God chose not to deliver Israel from the Roman armies in Luke 21:20-24, but now he does. What has changed God's posture toward Israel? Why the rescue now and not then? Well, then they had rejected their Messiah, and they were stubborn and inflexible and stiff-necked in that rejection.

But now by God's grace, the nation repents, the nation believes, and that changes everything. They've put themselves, taken themselves out of position of judgment of God, and they put themselves in a position to receive the mercy of God. And they didn't do it of their own accord. God did it by his grace.

This is Zechariah 12:10. When the nation looks upon Jesus, the one "whom they have pierced" and "weeps bitterly" for him. And "in that day," Zechariah 13:1 says, "a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity."

The nation's going to undergo this spiritual regeneration, the revival of all revivals, by divine grace, by the power of the Holy Spirit, wholesale, Israel returns to God, trusting in

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Jesus their Messiah. And when they do that, God is pleased to send his Christ immediately to their rescue.

This is how the great Messianic Psalm, Psalm 110, ends. "The Lord is at your right hand. He will crush kings in the day of his anger. He will render justice among the nations. He'll fill them with corpses. He'll crush the head that's over the wide earth. He'll drink from the brook by the wayside. Therefore, he will lift up his head."

So he's anticipating a time, and he tells his disciples about it, when he's going to be lifting up his head; so are his people. He commands Israel to stand up and to stand at attention, to stand erect, shoulders back, chin up. He calls his nation to take, not only stand up because of comfort, but stand up because "now you are at the central place in my kingdom." That's when his Apostles will eat and drink at his table in his kingdom, Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30. They will sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

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I'm being all too brief here because of the sake of time. Almost every point I want to turn into another sermon.

But folks, how are you anticipating Christ's return? Does this story, do you just pass it off as fiction, or is it a, a living reality in your life? Does it make a difference in how you live now, day by day, week by week, season by season?

"And now, little children," 1 John 2:28 says, "abide in him," now abide in him. Do it now, "so that when he appears, then we may have confidence and not shrink away from him in shame at his coming." Why would any professing Christian shrink back, shrink away from Christ in shame when he comes again? How could that happen? Because they're not living right.

Oh, beloved, dear Christian, do not give your precious life to lesser things. Live in light of his return. Read the Scripture; study it well enough to see this great hope, as Jesus comes to execute God's final solution for the world, Jew and Gentile, believing and unbelieving.

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For those who know their Bibles well, and for those who let God's Word have its way with them to confront them and correct them and discipline them and disciple them and train them; for them, when the Lord returns in divine glory and power, he will be, as (1) 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 says, "glorified in his saints on that day, marveled at among all those who have believed."

We anticipate the fulfillment of all the promises. We anticipate all justice and vengeance, and all hope and joy, all consummated then, when Christ returns to earth. So since these things are going to happen exactly as predicted, Peter's question stands, "What sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming day of God?" What kind of people ought we to be?

And the writer to the Hebrews says this, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together

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as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, nothing but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who sets aside the law of Moses dies without mercy by the mouth of two or three witnesses.”

Well, how much worse punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded, has defiled the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Love what Jesus loves. He loves his church, he loves his people, he loves his Gospel. Love what he loves. Don't insult the Son of God. Don't insult the Spirit of grace, for “we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine. I will repay.’” If you call him Father, take his word seriously. Again, the Lord will judge

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his people. "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Some of you know the little poem by Charles Thomas Studd, known as C. T. Studd. He was converted under D. L. Moody's ministry, and he gave his life to the missionary cause in China, India, and Africa. He wrote this little poem that you've probably heard:

Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in that day my Lord to meet,
And stand before His judgment seat;

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Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only whats done for Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to Gods holy will to cleave;

Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only whats done for Christ will last.

Only one life, a few brief years,
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its days I must fulfill.
living for self or in His will;

When this bright world would tempt me sore,
When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way,
Then help me Lord with joy to say;

Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only whats done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;

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Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;

Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;

Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say, 'Twas worth it all";

Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Father, thank you for giving us the joy of anticipating Christ's return. And for those who may be here or may listen to this message who do not yet know you, we pray that the indicatives of Christ's proclamation about the future would settle in their hearts and you would grant them faith, eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to respond and believe and embrace the truth. Let them repent of all that sin and self, self-

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righteousness, self-affirmation, let them abandon all of that, humble themselves before you before it's too late.

And we pray, Father, that for all those of us who do know you, you would use these words that you used to comfort the disciples to comfort us as well, to see this glorious future, this consummation of our hope, to see the plan in place. It's inflexible, it's fixed, it's coming.

As we hold on, waiting for that blessed, glorious day of his appearing, help us to be faithful as we invest in this time, in our place, that we would plant a tree that it may grow for tomorrow, that we'd continue to cast the seed of the Gospel, that we'd continue to teach and invest and make disciples. Would you help us to grow together in holiness and to love your truth and to love your people.

I pray for everyone who hears this, that every single one of us would be greatly encouraged by the truth that all things will resolve fully and finally in you, and you will get your

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glory, and Christ will have his day, and we will be with him. In
Jesus' name we pray. Amen.