



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 21:5-38  
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## Ready or Not, Here I Come!

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

The day before terrorists attacked New York and Washington, a 5th grader in a Dallas suburb told his teacher World War III would begin the next day. Rhonda Lucich, a director of elementary education for the school district, was told about the boy's comment by his teacher and the school's principal two days after the September 11 attacks. She said the boy approached his teacher on the afternoon of September 10 and casually told her: "Tomorrow, World War III will begin. It will begin in the United States, and the United States will lose." The child then missed the next two days of school, September 11 and 12. The statements were passed along to the FBI, but Lucich didn't know whether the agency had acted on the tip. An FBI spokesman couldn't be reached for comment. "It's one of those things I sincerely want to believe was coincidental," Lucich said.

I don't know about you, but I'm kind of skeptical about that kind of stuff. I think it probably WAS a coincidence. You have to consider the source. But let's face it, the idea of predicting the future fascinates us. What if I told you that Jesus Christ made an amazingly accurate prediction of a future event, one that was substantiated by three different gospel writers and later confirmed by non-believing historians. You'd probably believe me because it wasn't a 5th grader; it was Jesus.

In Luke 21:5-36 Jesus delivers one of his best known and longest sermons. It's a sermon about the future. We call it the Olivet Discourse. It's been the subject of more scholarly debate than any other passage in the gospels. We have to approach this passage with humility. No scholar has perfectly unraveled all the knots. We won't either. But I want us to look at the broad strokes and nail down the things that are clear.

The occasion for the sermon was that Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem. Jesus was spending these final days of his earthly life teaching in the temple during the day and spending the night on the Mt. of Olives (vv.37-38). On one of these days, Luke says up in v.5 that **"some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts."** They weren't kidding! The temple was considered one of the great wonders of the Roman world. It had been under reconstruction for 46 years and was almost done. Its location on Mt. Moriah made it look like a mountain of gold. The Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that when the sun shone on it "it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their

eyes..." Some of its stones were as large as an SUV. It was breathtaking, kind of like the Twin Towers, yet listen to what Jesus says. **"As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down"** (v. 6). That's quite a prediction! His words were tragically true. In 70 A.D. the Romans invaded the city and ordered both the city and the temple razed to the ground. Soldiers first gutted it by fire and then literally pulled the stones apart in an attempt to reclaim the melted gold.

The disciples had to be stunned. So later, probably back at the Mt. of Olives, they questioned him. **"They questioned Him, saying, 'Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?'"** (v. 7). They want to know the times and the signs, the when and the what that will proceed this terrible event. Jesus will go on and answer their question, but some of what he says even goes beyond that to not just the end of the temple but the end of the world when he himself would return to judge the nations. One of the challenges of this passage is that some of the things that he says about what will happen prior to the fall of Jerusalem also apply to what will happen prior to his return. Remember that as we go along.

We can divide his sermon into two parts. The first part, vv.8-24, deals with the period of history before the end. The second part, vv.25-36, deals with the return of Christ and the end itself.

In vv.8-24 Jesus says that difficult times are coming. He lists a number of what we might call signs of the age.

### I. Difficult times will proceed the end (21:5-24)

**A. False Christs:** He starts out in v.8, **"And He said, 'See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not go after them.'"** Down through history there have been those who have either claimed to be Christ or made claims about themselves that are only true of Christ: Jim Jones and the People's Temple, David Koresh and Branch Davidians, Marshall Applewhite and Heaven's Gate, just to name a few.

**B. Wars:** And then he goes on in vv.9-10. **"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.' Then He continued by saying to them, 'Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom,...'" Historian Will Durant wrote a few years back, "War is one of the constants of history, and is not diminished with civilization and democracy. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war." The last few years haven't added to that number!

**C. Natural disasters:** Jesus goes on and speaks of natural disasters. "...and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven" (v. 11). California is in the Bible after all! But earthquakes took place in Jesus' day as well. Soon after this there was a terrible earthquake in Laodicea where many were killed. Famines and plagues often go hand in hand with natural disasters as many are disenfranchised and diseased. We don't know exactly what he means by "signs from heaven" but we can think of things like the vernal equinox and a lunar eclipse and the Hale-Bopp comet lighting up the night skies.

**D. Persecution:** But then he gets more personal. These difficult times will be especially hard on his own followers. **"But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake....But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name"** (vv. 12, 16-17). This is strong language. God's people will not be "bubble wrapped" during this time. Verse 12 describes literally what happened to his disciples in the book of Acts as they were imprisoned and brought before both Jewish and Roman officials. But that's not all. Jesus says families will turn against each other. We'll be hated by all because of him.

A friend of mine was sharing his faith with a man from an Islamic country. The man was captivated by the gospel. But when my friend asked him to pray to trust Christ he responded, "If I do that, then when I get back to my country my family will disown me, I will lose my job, and my children will never be allowed to attend a university." He didn't do it. In many parts of the world, what Jesus said here is happening right now.

**E. Jerusalem destroyed:** Finally, Jesus gets back to what would happen to Jerusalem. Look at vv.20-24. **"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. 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 country 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 to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Now he describes in detail what would happen in 70 A.D. Roman legions would surround the city and many would fall by the sword and be taken captive. The Holy City would be trampled upon by Gentiles. It all happened exactly as Jesus said. But at the time it must have sounded as crazy then as a fifth grader saying World War III would start the next day.

This is not a real pretty picture, is it? It's a dark picture. But this is what Jesus tells us we can expect between his first coming and his second coming. One of the mistakes Christians often make is to associate these things with the end. But Jesus clearly says in v.9 that "the end does NOT follow immediately." And in v.24 he speaks of "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled. That's the extended period of time we're in now. It's a time when God's purpose is centered on Gentiles coming to Christ. Paul spoke of that time in Romans 11:25 when he said that **"a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in."** We're still in that period and it's not all a bed of roses. So the question becomes, how do we handle this? What do we do during these difficult times? If we go back through these same verses we can see that Jesus tells us NOT to do several things.

## **II. God's people should respond with wisdom and faith (21:5-24)**

**A. Don't be misled:** Go back up to v.8. With regard to the false prophets, he says "don't be misled" and "don't go after them." Why? Because MANY will make these same claims, which means they're lying! How spiritually gullible are you? Are you able to see through the proud claims of those who say they KNOW when the end will take place? They're the ones who are saying "the time is near." We have to be more discerning. We have to know the Word of God well enough that when something is off we instinctively know it; we smell it.

**B. Don't be terrified:** Then in v.9 he says don't be terrified. When you hear of wars, don't be freaked out. Why? Because "these things MUST take place first." That "must" is a divine must. God is behind that "must." In other words, don't freak out because God is working out his plan. I must say, I see a lot of fear in Christians when we talk about these things. That's why a lot of people prefer to believe that God's people will be raptured before all this happens. It's okay to believe that if you see it in Scripture, but don't believe it out of wishful thinking just because you're terrified of these things. It may seem like things are out of

control, but they're not. Everything is on schedule.

**C. Don't prepare a defense:** It's hard to figure out why God would allow some of these things to happen as part of his plan. But we can see it in the next thing he says. He says when you're arrested and brought before kings something positive happens. Look at vv.13-15. **"It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute."** These things are an opportunity for you to be a witness. You see, God is at work in all of this. So don't prepare before what you're going to say because God will give you irrefutable words of wisdom. Forget about the 3x5 cards. Forget about bringing a tract. Just trust God and he'll give you the words. I know some pastors who think this applies to their weekly message. "Oh, I don't need to prepare. God will give me the words." But he's talking about a specific situation of being brought before officials. In that case, he says don't prepare a defense.

**D. Don't give up:** It's kind of strange, but right after he says some of you will be hated by family members and even killed, he says in vv.18-19. **"Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives."** How can you be killed but not have a hair on your head perish? I believe he's talking about the fact that not a hair of your head will perish apart from God's sovereign control. And even if you do die, you will gain your soul. That's why he says, "By your endurance you will gain your lives (souls)."

The next thing we're not to do in the midst of these difficulties is give up. Why? Because God will protect you and whether you live or die you have him. I don't think we talk enough about the value of endurance in the Christian life. Some of you are going through some real trials and testings right now. You wonder, why? What is God doing? I can tell you for sure he's producing in you endurance. You don't learn that when everything goes your way. A long distance runner doesn't gain endurance by sitting on the couch, but by being tested.

**E. Don't stay in Jerusalem:** The last thing he says in vv.20-24 applies to the people of his day. If you're in Jerusalem in 70 A.D don't stick around. Don't try to find refuge within the walls of the city because it will be destroyed. Flee to the mountains. That's why it will be so hard for those who are pregnant or nursing. It's hard to flee when you're in that condition. Sometimes Christians think that it's faithless to flee, but in this situation, Jesus says, that's the best thing to do. Get out of there. Why? Verse 22 says **"because these are days of vengeance,"** and v.23 talks about **"wrath to this people."** Make no mistake, God was judging Israel through these events. Just like he said he would in the OT. They had rejected his Son, now they're paying for it. Where do people get the idea that God won't judge and that his judgment won't be fierce? Not from the

Bible! Part of what we're supposed to learn from the fall of Jerusalem is that God is serious about sin. And as painful as the fall of Jerusalem was, it will be nothing compared to the judgment to come. He warned them of judgment and it came just a few years later. His prediction was fulfilled to the letter. Today, he warns us of judgment as well. What will we do? In a sense, all we can do is flee. Flee from the wrath of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

But that's not all. I'm so glad Jesus didn't end his sermon there. In the second half of his sermon, he spoke not of signs of this age, but signs of the end; signs of his unmistakable coming.

### III. Christ will return in an unmistakable way (21:25-36)

**A. Apocalyptic signs:** Look what he says in vv.25-26. **"There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."** Jesus is using what we call apocalyptic language, much of which was borrowed from the OT. For example, Joel 2:30-31 says, **"And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes."** All of this is apocalyptic language for some kind of violent change in the natural order. You might say these are unnatural disasters.

**B. Dismay, perplexity and fear:** As a result, Jesus says there will be dismay, perplexity and fear among the nations. In other words, there will be widespread panic throughout the earth. Have you seen thousands of people panic at once? Imagine 5 or 6 billion people in a state of panic!

**C. The return of Christ:** We don't know how long that will go on, but amidst this universal confusion, Christ will appear in an unmistakable way. Look at v.27. **"Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory."** The Son of Man was the term used for the Messiah in the book of Daniel. How different will this second coming be from his first. He won't come as meek and lowly, but with power and glory. He won't come riding on a donkey, but riding a cloud. He won't come bearing a cross, but a sword.

So how do we respond to this? What do we do in light of this?

### IV. God's people must be ready (21:25-36)

**A. Look up in hope:** In contrast to unbelievers who are in state of panic, look what he says we should do. **"But when these things begin to take place,**

**straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.**" To "straighten up and lift up your head" means that something wonderful is happening; something hopeful. And he tells us what that is: your redemption is near. You're about to be delivered. That's something to look forward to.

A year ago today my oldest daughter got married right here in this church. We had a big floral arrangement right in the middle of the lobby. And right before I walked her down the aisle the two of us hid behind that arrangement because she didn't want to be seen by the groom as he came out and waited up here. And I remember so well as we came out from behind that arrangement and they swung the doors open and there he was...and there SHE was...and there I was, but I didn't matter. They were locked on each other. The bride was ready, dressed in white. When Christ returns as our bridegroom, we'll gaze on him as longingly as any bride has ever looked upon her groom.

**B. Recognize the signs:** Then he goes on and talks about WHEN this will happen. "**Then He told them a parable: 'Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away'**" (vv.29-33). Jesus says that when these final, cosmic apocalyptic signs take place, then know that the time is here. That's his answer to the when question. Notice he doesn't give us a calendar. Just, "when you see the events of vv.25-26, you know the kingdom is near." Then he says, "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." This verse has confused a lot of people. Who does he mean by "this generation?" The people he was talking to? If so, Jesus was wrong, because he didn't return while they were still alive. No, Jesus was talking about the generation of people living in the end times. The generation who is alive to see these signs described in vv.25-26 will not die off before Christ returns.

**C. Be alert and prayerful:** So those who are alive in that day should recognize the signs and look up in hope. But what do we do in the meantime? Jesus tells us in vv.34-36. "**Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to**

**stand before the Son of Man.**" Jesus wants us to be ready and able to stand before him when he comes. He wants us to be prepared. And so he says we have to do a couple of things.

*First, we have to be on guard against being lulled to sleep by the things of this world.* It could be worldly pleasures or it could be worldly worries. Either thing can be deadly anesthesia for the soul. Do you know what dissipation means? It means excess. This is where we live today. How many of us are just drunk with the things of this life? We have our families and our houses and our cars and our vacations and our bills and our retirement and our televisions and our Giants games and life is just so good. Jesus says be on guard against being so preoccupied with the things of earth that the return of Jesus becomes a nice afterthought; kind of like having dessert after a nice meal: "Yeah, that sounds nice. I'll have some, but I am kind of full."

*Second, he says we have to keep alert and pray for the strength to escape all these things.* He doesn't mean "escape" in terms of not having to go through it, but in the sense of standing firm against temptations. We're in a battle. It's not easy to follow Christ. We can't do it ourselves. We have to be dependent on him. This is the answer to those who wonder if they will be able to make it through all of this without denying Christ. I wonder that. Jesus says, "So pray for strength."

## CONCLUSION

Several years ago I ran a marathon. I trained hard for about five months to be as prepared as possible. But there is part of a marathon that's hard to prepare for. A marathon is just a little over 26 miles. But when you train the experts tell you not to run over 20 miles. So the last six miles are really "no man's land." You don't really know what you're going to do in those last six miles. You may "hit the wall." You may have cramps. You know it's going to be tough. But you also try to believe that if you train hard enough you will be ready and you will be able to cross that glorious finish line.

We read a passage like this and it's like we're reading about the last six miles of a marathon. We know it's going to be hard. We know that there is nothing we can do now to quite replicate what it will like then. But in this passage Jesus has told us not only what to look for but HOW to be prepared; how to cross the finish line.

We prepare by being wise and discerning about the false claims of religious hucksters.

We prepare by resting in the fact that God is sovereign and whatever happens to us is part of his plan.

We prepare by trusting that he's creating opportunities for us to bear witness and he'll give us the words we need when we need them.

We prepare by learning to endure hardship now so that when greater hardship comes then we don't fall by the wayside.

We prepare by refusing to allow ourselves to buy the lie that the things of this world are the most important things.

We prepare by praying each day for God's strength to face whatever the last six miles of life may hold for us.

In a poem, *Let Me Get Home Before Dark*, Robertson McQuilkin writes,

*It's sundown, Lord.*

*The shadows of my life stretch back*

*into the dimness of the years long spent.*

*I fear not death, for that grim foe betrays himself at last,*

*thrusting me forever into life:*

*Life with You, unsoiled and free.*

*But I do fear.*

*I fear the Dark Spectre may come too soon*

*- or do I mean, too late?*

*That I should end before I finish or*

*finish, but not well.*

*That I should stain Your honor, shame Your name,*

*grieve Your loving heart.*

*Few, they tell me, finish well . . .*

*Lord, let me get home before dark.*

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