



“Jesus’ Return”
Luke 21:5-38

Idea: Jesus will return to earth one day to receive His Kingdom.

Intro: Today is recognized as Palm Sunday on our calendars. We celebrate it as the day that Jesus “triumphantly” entered the city of Jerusalem with shouts of praise from the people (Mark 11:1-11). Next Sunday is Easter Sunday. It is the day that commemorates the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. These are special dates on our calendars because they mark special moments in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. One of the things that makes these moments special is the fact that they were the fulfillment of prophecy. It was the prophet Zechariah who predicted that the true king of Israel would come to Jerusalem on a young, unbroken colt (Zech 9:9). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy when He descended the Mount of Olives on a colt amid the fanfare and waving of palm branches. It was God the Father who told the serpent in Eden that his head would be crushed by the seed of the woman even as he bruised his heel (Gen 3:15). Similarly, Jesus spoke of His death, burial, and resurrection as a fulfillment of this protevangelium or first gospel (Luke 18:31-34). As we finish out the last few chapters in Luke this spring, we will see how Jesus fulfilled all that was *“written about the Son of Man”* (Luke 18:31).

Why is this important? Why spend time pointing out historical markers and prophetic connections? The reason for this, just as I have pointed out recently, is that the Christian faith is a historical faith. What we believe is concrete. It is set in the historical account of the Bible’s teachings. It is not arbitrary. Instead, it is historically verifiable and biblically consistent. Therefore, as we read through the Bible, we discover that it works together as one grand story rather than a loose collection of random stories. As such, we are encouraged to remain faithful to its teachings, knowing that everything it says will come true despite our circumstances.

Inquiry: As we have walked through the first twenty chapters of Luke’s Gospel, we have watched everything in Jesus’ life and ministry move to this moment. Since chapter nine, He has specifically been journeying toward Jerusalem (9:51). Jesus is now in the last week of His life. In the preceding days, He has triumphantly entered Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple, and entered in numerous debates with the religious leaders. In each case, His debaters were silenced. Then, by exalting the poor widow and her gift, He passed judgment on the religious establishment. Now, Jesus has left the Temple for good. The cross awaits Him, and our passage today, which is known as the Olivet Discourse, serves as a fitting bridge to His final days. Jesus’ last address will be a farewell prophecy.

The disciples have followed and served with Jesus for roughly three years. They have watched Him perform numerous miracles and heard Him teach thousands of people, yet they still did not fully grasp how the Kingdom of God would become a reality. Every time Jesus spoke of His death, burial, and resurrection, they were confused (18:34). Peter on one occasion even rebuked Jesus for saying such a thing (Matt 16:22). The

crucifixion will devastate the faith of the disciples, and the Lord knows it. They have put all their hopes in Him as their Messiah, so His death will seem like the end of that hope. As an encouragement, Jesus offers a description of how He will return to claim His Kingdom. He does this so that the disciples might be strengthened by the truth and endure until the end comes.

Read Luke 21:5-38.

From this passage, we are reminded that Jesus will in fact return to earth one day to receive His Kingdom. Knowing He will return, believers should anticipate and be prepared for that day. There are three realities presented as things to look for as we anticipate the King's return.

Three Realities

1. Doomsday deceivers will be prevalent before His return. (vs. 5-9)

As Jesus and the disciples were leaving the Temple, one of them marveled over its beauty and splendor (Mark 13:1). This statement was not hyperbole. The Temple was considered one of the great wonders of the Roman world. As this statement was made, the Temple was being renovated and expanded. The project had been in the works for over forty-six years (John 2:20), and it would not be completed until AD 63. Its spectacular location on Mt. Moriah gave it an imposing dominance over ancient Jerusalem. From a distance it looked like a mountain of gold; because its nine massive gates and much of its exterior were plated with gold, silver, and jeweled sculptures such as the famous grapevine.

The Temple was indeed spectacularly glorious, but if the disciples were hoping to lift Jesus' spirit with their admiration, then they failed miserably. The Lord's reply left them dumbfounded. He told them that the Temple, in all its glory and strength, would be obliterated (vs. 6). History records that when Emperor Titus first conquered Jerusalem, he ordered the Temple to be preserved, but it was gutted by a fire accidentally set by one of his soldiers. As a result, Titus ordered the Temple and the entire city to be leveled. Roman soldiers dissected the Temple to reclaim the gold and jewels.

According to Mark, four disciples (Peter, James, John, and Andrew) were astounded by Jesus' prophecy. As they sat with Jesus on top of the Mount of Olives, they asked Him to explain when this would take place (Mark 13:3-4). They sat one hundred and fifty feet higher than the city, which gave them a dramatic view of the Temple. This scene and the subsequent questions the disciples asked set the stage for the three realities Jesus described.

There will be doomsday deceivers prevalent before Jesus' return. These deceivers, however, can and will be seen in every age of the church. Believers must be on guard against false teachers who claim to be Christ (vs. 8), carefully discerning their teachings. False teachers like to use wars, natural disasters, and human suffering to prop up their message and appeal, yet these things have been present within human history since Genesis 3. They will continue till Jesus returns. Therefore, as we anticipate His return, we must never allow ourselves to interpret the chaotic events of life as meaning it is all over. For example, the fighting happening in Israel today has been going on for thousands of years, and it will continue. These things are the natural result of sin and will remain to the end of time.

2. Destruction and persecution will precede His return. (vs. 10-24)

Amid the wars and natural disasters, there will also be ongoing destruction and persecution of believers. Jesus foretold how His disciples would be treated by their fellow Jews and by the Romans (vs. 12). We know from Acts how Peter, John, and Stephen were brought before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13; 6-7). Likewise, Paul stood before King Agrippa (Acts 25-13-26:32). These men and others experienced intense personal hatred for their commitment to Jesus. His words remind us that our loyalty to Him and His gospel will bring us many adversaries. He says, *"You will be hated by all"* (vs. 17). Even the

closest of family and friends are apt to turn on you for your faith in Jesus and hope in His gospel. Therefore, we should not be surprised when persecution comes, whether it is from religious circles, secular circles, or domestic circles. Instead, we are to persevere, endure, and stand firm in our faith because we anticipate these as signs of Jesus' return.

To further strengthen and solidify the disciples' faith, He speaks prophetically about the future of Jerusalem (vs. 20-24). Their original question was about the Temple, so Jesus offers a specific answer to the question regarding the Holy City. Jerusalem would be surrounded by a mighty army, and its destruction would be imminent. His exhortation was that when they saw this event unfolding, they were to do everything in their power to flee the city because those in the city when it fell would be slain or enslaved. Again, history is our friend, and we know this destruction took place in AD 70, under Emperor Titus. Now, as awful as this scene was, Jesus prepared His disciples for it. So, rather than viewing this event as the world spinning out of control, they could and did interpret it as God being firmly in control and ready to bring sin to an end in judgment. We too, observing and experiencing destruction and persecution, recognize that these things are the natural result of sin and will remain to the end of time.

3. Distress throughout the heavens and earth will preface His return. (vs. 25-28)

The first two realities are a constant, but they will intensify as the time draws nearer to Jesus' return. The third reality in the Olivet Discourse speaks specifically about events in the future. I can picture Jesus lifting His eyes from the Temple and looking beyond it as He draws from the language of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Is 13:10; 34:4; Ezek 32:7; Hag 2:6, 21).

³⁰*And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.*

³¹*The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. – Joel 2:30-31*

The eschaton will feature unnatural disasters in the heavens and on the earth, which will result in worldwide anguish and trepidation. These disasters will be unexplainable and sudden. Joel's reference to the sun being darkened is not a reference to a solar eclipse like the one taking place on April 8th. We know this for two reasons. First, a total solar eclipse only effects a limited section of the earth. People living within the eclipse's track can see the moon blocking the sun during that short window, but others outside of it see only a partial eclipse. The darkening that Joel describes is a global phenomenon. Second, astronomers can track and predict eclipses. The next total solar eclipse visible from the U.S. will happen again on August 23, 2044. This darkening will take place suddenly and be unexplainable.

When these things take place, amid the confusion they will cause, Jesus will return in glory. Since these events will be so unexplainable, believers should recognize them as the preface to Jesus' return. In light of these realities, we see four exhortations as we anticipate this return.

Four Exhortations

1) Be alert and know the signs of the times. (vs. 29-33)

The parable Jesus tells in verses 29-33 should be easy to understand since we see similar things happening right now. Trees are beginning to bud and blossom. They seem to be rousing from winter's long sleep. As we observe this annual occurrence, we know that hot summer days will soon be here. Even when there is a cold snap like this past week, we know that summer is coming. It is happening.

In the same manner, we know that everything Jesus has said about His return will happen. Just as Jerusalem was destroyed as prophesied, Jesus will return, so let us be alert and know the signs of the times. When He does return, there will be no more time to prepare.

2) **Be watchful over your heart and life.** (vs. 34-36)

Jesus issues a call to vigilance from the official site of His return (Acts 1:11-12). We are told to watch and pray. We ought to watch over our hearts so that they do not become weighed down with the cares of this life to the neglect of that great day. We want to live in the temporal world with our eyes on eternity. Likewise, we ought to pray for strength so that we can endure the struggles and persecution of this temporal world, keeping our eyes on eternity. It has been said that the best way to prepare for the life to come is a present life of prayer.

3) **Be ready to speak of Jesus.** (vs. 13)

When Jesus was describing the destruction and persecution preceding His return, He mentioned that the disciples would be brought before religious and governing authorities. They would be forced to testify of their faith in Jesus. Now, this would have been terrifying for any believer. They knew that their testimony could, and many times would result in their beating or death, yet Jesus told them not to fret about what to say. Instead, the Holy Spirit would embolden them and put in their mouths the words to say and give them great wisdom (vs. 15).

This very thing happened to Stephen. He was falsely accused and brought before the Sanhedrin for questioning. Luke tells us that Stephen boldly preached the gospel to those men, which resulted in them becoming enraged against him. As they ridiculed him, Stephen was given the ability to see into heaven, where he saw Jesus standing on his behalf. The men of the Sanhedrin stoned Stephen to death that day for his testimony. Rather than fearing their rage, Stephen graciously asked the Lord to not hold his death against them (Acts 7:54-60). Let's pray for and expect opportunities to speak of Jesus even when they come from places of suffering.

4) **Be present with Jesus.** (vs. 37-38)

In the final two verses, Luke sums up Jesus' daily activities during this last week. He continues to teach, and the people continue to come to Him. What a mighty word for us to hear today. The only way we can ever expect to be alert, to be watchful, and to be ready is to first be present with Jesus. Christian, keep coming to Jesus and listening to His Word. Give attention to it by heeding it in your life. By doing so, you will be ready when Jesus returns.

Conclusion: After three years of ministry with the Lord, the disciples will soon face their greatest test. They have watched Him perform miracles, teach thousands of people, and control every attempt to stop His ministry. They have heard Him speak many times of His death, burial, and resurrection, but it never made sense. They, however, did recognize Him as the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, and they had put all their hopes in this reality. So, His death will seem like the end of that hope. As an encouragement, Jesus offers a description of how He will return to claim His Kingdom that will be purchased on the cross. He does this so that the disciples might be strengthened by the truth and endure until the end comes.

On this Palm Sunday, we too can wonder about the promises of God and whether the Lord will make good on them. We look around and see a world that seems to be getting worse. Evil is everywhere, and the Church is losing its influence. If we are not careful, we will slip into despair or complacency. Jesus' reminder of His return assures us that He will return to earth one day to receive His Kingdom. Therefore, we must keep our eyes on the sky (vs. 28), vigilantly remaining alert, watchful, ready, and present with Jesus.