

32. The signs of the end of the age

February 24, 2008

I don't know if you fly in commercial airlines often or not, but when you hear your plane captain's announcement, stewardesses taking the stuff away from you and making you sit upright in an uncomfortable position and putting your tray into locked position and hear the noise of the landing gears coming out. That is a very good sign that you might land in one piece. You know that your flight is about to be over.

As Jesus was facing His own crucifixion in a matter of a couple of days, this is the last public lesson He was giving to the people. Appropriately, He was telling them about the signs of the end of the age to come. Unfortunately, the majority of people either ignored it or didn't comprehend it because they were so wrapped up in their own things.

Along with many Bible teachers and believers around the world, I, too, believe that we are literally living in the edge of the time when Jesus is about to come to get His believers out of this world for the seven year tribulation to start. In other words, the rapture of the believers around the world can happen any moment.

Before we study this chapter, we need to go over the basic timeline of the end time prophecy.

Now let's hear from Jesus what the signs of the end of age are. But most importantly, we need to learn to watch and be ready.

A. THE WIDOW'S TWO MITES

Luke 21:1-4 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, 2 and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. 3 So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; 4 for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

Chapter 20 ended with Jesus warning His disciples about the scribes, who showed off their piety into long, ornate prayers for people to admire, while they mercilessly robbed the most vulnerable people in society.

As chapter 21 begins, Jesus looked through the mix of worshipers crisscrossing the temple, and spotted an example of genuine spirituality – a poor widow who gave everything she had to God without anyone's acknowledgement.

The financial mathematics that is used in heaven is not according to the amount people give, rather individual's heart and trust toward God. That is why the Lord Jesus said this widow's two mites which is not much more than 1% of the average daily wage, was more than all the rich people's donation. God is not telling us to give everything we have to Him. The value of a gift is determined by what it costs to the giver.

If you are giving tithe and offerings to God with different motives than a willing and cheerful heart to serve and trust Him, they will be burned up when they go through the fire of God according to 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's

work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

If you are not giving to the Lord because you think that it is your money, I don't want to be you when you see Jesus face to face in heaven. You are going to regret being selfish and greedy on earth.

B. THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

1) The destruction of the temple

Luke 21:5-6 Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, 6 "These things which you see--the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down."

This Herod's temple rebuilding work started in 19 B.C., and was only completed in A.D. 63, taking more than eighty years. It was finished only seven years before it was destroyed.

The Jewish historian Josephus says that the temple was covered on the outside with gold plates, that were so brilliant that when the sun shone on them, it was blinding to look at. Where there was no gold, there were blocks of marble of such a pure white that strangers, from a distance, thought there was snow on the temple.

For the Jewish people of that day, the temple had become an idol – it subtly began to mean more to the people than God Himself did. The things that dazzle people don't impress God and He has a habit of destroying our idols.

It is said that at the fall of Jerusalem, the last surviving Jews of the city fled to the temple, because it was the strongest, most secure building in the city. Roman soldiers surrounded it, and one drunken soldier started a fire that soon engulfed the whole building. Ornate gold detail work in the roof melted down in the cracks between the stone walls of the temple, and to retrieve the gold, the Roman commander ordered that the temple be dismantled stone by stone. The destruction was so complete that today, they have true difficulty learning the exact location of the temple.

2) False Messiahs

Luke 21:7-8 So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?" 8 And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them.

Satan is a counterfeiter who for centuries has led people astray by deceiving their minds and blinding their hearts. Israel was often seduced into sin by false prophets, and the church has had its share of false teachers.

It is very important for the believers of Jesus Christ to understand that the Jesus of the Jehovah's Witness, the Mormon and the New Age are not the same one as our Christianity. To help you with that study deeper, our Chapel Bookstore has this cult comparison chart for you. It is a handy piece to have it and study it for an occasion when you come across the people who are deceived by these cults. You can get them next Sunday since the Lehmans who oversee the ministry are out sick today.

Most people are naturally concerned about the future, especially when world current events are threatening our national security. In other words, religious racketeers can prey on them and take advantage of them. In every age, there are those who either claim to be the Christ or claim to know when He will return. These false prophets and teachers often "use" the Scriptures or claim to have special formulas or personal revelations from Jesus Himself to them to prove the accuracy of their predictions, in spite of the fact that Jesus clearly stated that nobody knows the time of His rapture.

3) Wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilence and persecutions

Luke 21:9-19 But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately." 10 Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. 12 But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. 13 But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. 14 Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head shall be lost. 19 By your patience possess your souls.

If I can sum up this portion of the Scripture in one simple sentence, it would be "Don't be afraid." There are persecutions against Christianity from the day one, now and will continue to the Second Coming of Christ.

There are 100,000 Christian people's death around the world yearly in present days according to the Voice of Martyr organization. During the Tribulation period, those who become Christians will be persecuted in far more intensity than ever before. Even now if the liberal people get hold of the power of the United States federal government, the persecution against Christianity will be many steps stronger than ever before.

Whether it is an official or personal persecution, it provides opportunities for witnessing about Jesus. We don't need to panic. The Holy Spirit will give us the right words, wisdom and courage.

For your further study, you should refer Matthew 24-25. However, you must keep in mind that the audience of these comments by Jesus in here and in Matthew were and will be Jews, not the church. By not understanding this, many well-meaning believers think that the rapture would happen after the Tribulation.

C. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

Luke 21:20-24 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. 22 For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. 23 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. 24 And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And

Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Jesus was going back to the topic He taught in v5-6 to explain more in detail. Dr. Luke was not referring this to what will happen during the Tribulation but to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Roman army in A.D. 70. This is the reason why Jesus wept over the city in chapter 19.

In a way it was a dress rehearsal for what will happen to the Jews by Satan during the second half of the Tribulation.

D. THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

Luke 21:25-28 "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 26 men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. 27 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

Revelation 15-19 describes the frightening judgment signs that God will send on the earth during the last half of the "time of Jacob's trouble" according to Jeremiah 30:7. When these things occur, it will be evidence that Jesus' coming is drawing near.

At the end of the second half of the Tribulation, Jesus Christ will appear, and every eye will see Him. The nation of Israel will at last recognize their Messiah, repent, believe and be saved.

Zechariah 12:10-14 "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. 11 In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; 13 the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; 14 all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves.

E. WATCHING AND BEING READY

Luke 21:29-38 Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. 34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. 35 For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." 37 And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. 38 Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.

In the Bible, fig tree often represents the nation of Israel. Not this time. The idea is that when a fig tree buds, there is an inevitable result – summer is near, and fruit is coming. In the same way, when these signs are seen, the coming of Jesus in glory, with His church, to this world will inevitably follow.

I asked you to underline 'generation in v32. Many people could not understand this verse due to a poor rendering in just about every translation. It should be translated as "race" which points to the Jewish people. They are God's chosen people. He will protect them against all odds.

I remember the conversation with a non-believer who told me that Jesus said He would be back two thousand years ago, but He is not here yet. So this man believes that it would be another two thousand years before the Lord comes back.

I know that he WANTS to believe that Jesus won't be back in his lifetime. He might be right. He might die in his old age with all the luxuries he can enjoy on this earth. But to him, what he has on this earth would be heaven, because hell is waiting for Him since he does not have Jesus in his heart. There are millions and billions people who are living like that. One way or another, they will face eternal damnation in hell.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Be on guard, resisting the things that deny His return.

These would be "*carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life*" in v34. Our lifestyles reveal whether we truly believe Christ will return or whether we deny that He will reign as King of Kings.

2) Keep on the alert, anticipating the One who will return.

Jesus isn't going to whisper in our ears that He's coming back in two months. He could come back any time. So we must get ready by praying for strength and staying ready so that we, too, can lift up our heads as our redemption draws near.

Are you worthy to escape all these things that will come during the Great Tribulation which is hell on earth? The worthiness is not decided by anyone other than God Himself. Unless you are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, you are not worthy to go to heaven. Would you like your sins to be forgiven? Would you like to have peace that passes all men's understanding?