

THE SON OF MAN IS COMING WITH GREAT POWER AND GLORY

Mark 13:1-37

Key Verse 13:26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”

Today’s passage is Jesus’ prophecies regarding the destruction of the temple, the signs of the end times and his Second Coming. It feels like we are living in the end times. Rain is pouring down like massive waterfalls. These sudden flash floods remind us of Noah’s flood. Hailstorms in the summer, tornadoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, deadly heat waves, rising sea levels, melting glaciers, dry rivers and water shortages are rapidly increasing in frequency and intensity. Wars and rumors of wars are reported every day. The pandemic has gotten worse again. We now live in a terrible time. Does it feel like our world is melting away? We may feel sorry for our children who have to live in this terrible time. But what shall we do? Is there any hope for us and our planet?

In his discourse, Jesus tells us where to put our hope and what is certain in the midst of uncertainty. What is certain? Jesus is coming again. And he will come with great power and glory at the end of this age. He will send his angels to gather his elect, and take us to a New heaven and a new earth, his dwelling place and our everlasting home. With this hope, we can eagerly and urgently wait for his return. And as we wait, we can share the gospel, stand firm to the end in the midst of all kinds of suffering, and faithfully carry out the tasks God has given us to do until he comes again. Through this message, may the Holy Spirit give us a living hope and right perspective of Jesus’ Second Coming.

I. The significance of the temple (1-4)

Look at verse 1. “As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’” According to Josephus, a Jewish historian, the Jerusalem Temple, built by King Herod over a period of 46 years, was a marvel- one of the greatest building projects of the 1st century. It sat on the highest point in Jerusalem and occupied a full one-sixth of the city. It was built of huge white marble stones, The largest stones were 45x11x16 feet: almost 6x larger than an average American bedroom. The temple was covered with a large golden dome. And when the sun shone on the temple, it was dazzling.

Why did this disciple suddenly reveal his amazement of the temple at that particular moment? It’s not like the disciple never saw the temple before. According to

Moses' law, every Jewish man had to come to the temple at least three times a year. So, the disciple must have seen the temple tons of times, not to mention 4 times that week! Why then did he draw Jesus' attention to the temple? I have an analogy that may help. To a tourist not familiar with American history, the White house or the Capitol in Washington D.C, could simply be an architectural wonder. But to many Americans, these buildings symbolize America itself. To capture or burn the Capital or the White House is like capturing America itself. Likewise, the temple was the center of Israel. Maybe the disciple wanted Jesus to start his earthly messianic kingdom in the temple right now. So he brought Jesus' attention to it- "What magnificent buildings! Hint, hint Jesus! Time to start world conquest starting from the temple!"

Jesus' response was completely unexpected. Look at verse 2. "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'

The temple of God was more than the center of political, religious and economic life of the Jews. It was God's house. It was where God met his people through the priestly and sacrificial system. There, the people worshiped God and received his forgiveness of their sins. In Exodus, God instructed Moses and his people to build the Tabernacle, a portable temple, in a very specific way. When it was built, God came down on it in clouds with power and glory and dwelt in it among them. He became their God and they became his people. As the people settled down in the land of Canaan, King Solomon built and dedicated the first magnificent temple to the Lord God. But when the Israelites kept breaking their covenant with God, the nation was divided and then destroyed by Assyria and Babylon. Both Jerusalem and Solomon's temple were totally destroyed by Babylon. The Israelites were then captives in Babylon for 70 years, and in those years, they mourned and grieved. When the Israelites came back from captivity, they built a small temple- called Zerubbabel's temple. Only hundreds of years later did King Herod rebuild this temple. This new and magnificent temple was the pride of every Jew. Finally, they could feel like their God was given a proper house to dwell. So, when Jesus was prophesying that the very temple would be destroyed to rubble, this was a devastating statement. There would no longer be a physical place where God would dwell. God would no longer live among the Israelites. In their thoughts, they no longer could worship him or offer their sacrifices. In addition, the destruction of the temple would mean the destruction of their nation. For us- it would have been Jesus predicting the complete destruction of deeply symbolic American buildings- the White House, the Capitol, and the Statue of Liberty, not to mention this great nation!

They all seemed shocked into silence until they climbed up the Mount of Olives. Look at verses 3-4. "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple,

Peter, James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?’” It is amazing that his disciples actually believed Jesus’ prophecy. Thus, they asked him two things: when it will happen and what will be the signs?

II. The signs of the end times and Jesus’ instructions (5-25, 28-37)

Let’s start with the signs of the end times. In verses 5-25, Jesus tells us 11 signs. What do these signs point to? They point to the end, not just of the Jewish nation, but the end of this physical world. But even more, these signs point to the beginning of a greater heavenly reality- The reality that everything on earth will pass away, but Jesus will come again in power and great glory, to take us home to be with him in eternity (26-27). So in brief, the 11 signs are- 1) False messiahs (5-6); 2) Wars and rumors of wars (7a); 3) International conflicts (8a); 4) Earthquakes and famines (8b); 5) Jewish people, kings and governors’ persecution (9); 6) The gospel preached in all nations (10); 7) Severe persecution from family members and hatred from everyone (12-13); 8) The abomination that causes desolation placed in God’s holy place (14a); 9) The destruction of the temple (2,14-19); 10) False messiahs and false prophets (22); Each of these will give Jesus’ disciples unavoidable distress (24a). Then at the end of the age, there will be the last sign, which is 11) celestial disasters (24-25). When all the signs are fulfilled, what will come next? Yes, the ultimate heavenly reality will come!

Not only did Jesus teach the signs of the end of the age, but he also gave his disciples instructions in two ways.

Firstly, Jesus teaches us to have the right perspective. When all these disasters occur- I don’t know about you, I am terrified and alarmed. But Jesus said, “Do not be alarmed” (7b). Such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (7b). When international conflicts and natural disasters happen more frequently and on a bigger level, Jesus tells us to view them as “the beginning of birth pains” (8b). I can never know birth pains. I only observed my wife going through them. They increased gradually and more intensely, almost until it was unbearable, even to watch. But then our son was born. His birth brought such amazement and joy. In the same way, Jesus tells us to hope and expect something amazing that comes out of such pains in the end.

Secondly, Jesus teaches us what to do and not to do. While living through the end times, Jesus tells us first and foremost to “watch out that no one deceives you” (5a). False messiahs will say, “I am he!” In times of great uncertainty and fear, people will rise up who promise security and victory. It is easy to be deceived by them and put our faith in a false messiah who promises great things. But when Jesus comes again, his coming will be globally seen. So, watch out! We are also told to preach the gospel to all nations (10). Jesus tells us to view persecution or hardships as opportunities to preach the gospel

saying, “Do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit” (11). Praise Jesus who promises that we are never alone. We have the Holy spirit living in us, counseling us, speaking through us, giving us words to say.

For example, when the first century Jewish Christians were persecuted by their fellow Jews, they were scattered all over the world. In that difficult time, they shared the gospel. Most of these men and women were ordinary people who had experienced the life changing power of Jesus in their lives. The Good news of Jesus who loved them, died for them, who rose again from the dead, and who was now living in them through the Holy Spirit was filling them with joy! The Holy Spirit, living in them, helped to spread this joy and good news wherever they went. When Apostle Paul was imprisoned, he preached to his prison guards, and eventually to governors, kings and the Roman Emperor. So, through persecution and the blood of the martyrs, the church grew as people witnessed the courage and love and joy of Christians. Similarly, as we live in through these troubled and distressing times, through the Pandemic, through global warming and wars in Afghanistan, may we as God’s people stand firm to the end (13), pray (18) and depend on the Holy Spirit and preach the gospel to all nations (10), starting in our homes, work places, campuses, neighborhoods, and go out to the ends of the earth. Surely, many who are broken and frightened will find the true hope in Jesus Christ through our witness!

III. Understanding the Coming of the Son of Man from the gospel perspective (26-27)

The question is- but how do I yearn for Jesus’ Second Coming? Despite all the hardships we have now, we still have so many beautiful things and people here, so many unrealized dreams. I’m too young, even in my 50s, to talk about the end of the world to come. But when I understand Jesus’ death and resurrection for our sins- then his return becomes the best news, better than the most glorious sunset or gourmet meal in Paris or the deepest human relationship we can ever have. How will his death and resurrection make his return so meaningful and magnificent? I’ll answer this question from the perspective of the temple of God.

To the Jews, the destruction of the temple was devastating. However, Jesus would soon be sacrificed as the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God on the cross according to God’s will. On that cross he took the sins of all humanity and God’s wrath would be poured out upon himself. When Jesus obeyed God the Father to the point of death, God raised him from the dead. After his resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. Apostle Paul exclaimed that God the Father exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name (Php 2:10). Jesus became the King of kings, Lord of lords. What was more, Jesus became the Heavenly High Priest

in the heavenly temple, where he entered not with the blood of animals but with his own blood once for all, and now where he intercedes for his people. No more is the physical temple the place where we meet God. Rather, when we accept Christ as our ultimate sacrifice for my sins, and believe God raised Jesus from the dead, and believe that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God interceding for me, then by faith we can follow Jesus to the throne of God's grace. And through the Holy Spirit dwelling with us, we are the temple of God individually and as his church. By knowing all of these things, Jesus prophesied that that physical temple would become obsolete.

If so, why does Jesus Christ have to return? It is through his Second Coming that Jesus will complete what he has already done through his first coming. Apostle Paul says in 2Co 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here." By faith, not by sight, we in Christ are new creations.

From the time we meet Christ, our inner person is renewed daily, our spirit alive and vibrant because of Jesus. But our physical body gets older, suffers disease and will perish. Our present earth is groaning with all kinds of disasters as a consequence of mankind's sins and carelessness. So it is only by faith that we are new creations. However, when Jesus comes again, it will be by sight that we will see God's consummated, complete and perfected creation. The New heaven and new earth, God's dwelling place, will be an eternal reality. When God first created human beings, they were not perfect. They could sin and even death was a possibility. However, through Jesus' Second Coming those who believe in Jesus will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. The dead in Christ will be raised to life. We in Christ will be clothed with the resurrection body, which is imperishable, immortal, honorable, spiritual, sinless and powerful. There are many more things that will come true through Jesus' Second Coming- which you can get a glimpse as you read Revelation.

Let's focus on one thing that Jesus prophesied in this passage. Shall we read verses 26-27 together. "At the time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens." Upon Jesus' Second Coming, people: both those who believe in him and those who have rejected him, will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. To God's elect the day will be the day of our full salvation and joy. To others who have not believed, that day will be the day of God's eternal judgement. When he comes again, the present or old heaven and earth will be gone, but through Jesus' great power he will bring a new heaven and new earth. Upon his Coming, God's elect will be gathered from the four corners of the world. No one who has believed in Jesus will be missing. No one who stands firm to the end will not be left behind. They will be gathered into New heaven and new earth. They

will see Jesus' smiling face. On that day, we in Christ will see the true and ultimate power and glory of Jesus. On that day, we in Christ who have been faithful to him and his tasks will hear him saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Mt 25:21,23) On the other hand, Rev 21:8 says, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

So how do we live now? The most important thing we are told to do is to anticipate his glorious and powerful return (26) with a sense of certainty holding onto his words. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (30-31). Jesus also wants his disciples to have a sense of urgency and earnestness saying in verses 32-37, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It is like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (32-37).

Is Jesus' Second Coming your hope? Is your life aligned with the truth of his Second Coming? Are you watching and waiting for his return eagerly, carrying out your assigned task faithfully? Are you sharing the gospel so that no one may go to the fiery lake of burning sulfur? As I examined my heart and life, I realized that I have other hopes, other things that are my security. I have a hope to establish a successful ministry at UIC. I also hope that my children become successful in their careers. I want to enjoy a long life with my wife. Are these hopes bad? They are not. These good things, however, sometimes cause us to be near-sighted and attached to the world, preventing us from seeing the ultimate heavenly reality. They are all temporary. This perspective of the things of the world enables me to seek after what is eternal, to preach the gospel desperately and to align my life in view of Jesus' Second Coming. I never want to become like Lot's wife, who became a pillar of salt by looking back at Sodom and Gomorrah under God's judgement.

May God bless us to urgently and earnestly look forward to Jesus' glorious Second Coming when he will reveal his glory as the Son of Man. In his power and glory he will complete God's redemptive history and purpose. May God bless you until Jesus' Second

coming becomes your ultimate and living hope, and gives you a proper perspective of all you do until he comes again.