

Passion Week: Tuesday evening – *The King Reveals Return*
Luke 21:5-38

Introduction: On Thursday night of Passion Week, Jesus finished the Passover meal with His disciples and released Judas to work out his insidious plan to bring soldiers to arrest Him. In these last hours before His arrest, trial, and subsequent death He had a few things that He still wanted to reiterate to His disciples, not only to prepare them but also to encourage them. They were entering into a time unknown to them, a world without Jesus walking with them, a world that was pitted against them, and a future that was confusing to them. That is why He informed them of coming of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead that would come to them and would be to their advantage (John 16:7). But He also told them about what He was doing in His absence:

John 14:1-3 *"Let not **your hearts be troubled**. Believe in God; believe also in me.² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and **prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.**"*

The language that He used is a bit foreign to us, since it was the language of betrothal. Remember the story of Mary and Joseph where Joseph was said to resolve to divorce Mary quietly (Matt. 1:19), but was talked out of it by the angel. This was because *betrothal* was the legal equivalent to marriage. A couple would be betrothed, then there would be a period of time where the husband would go to prepare a home for his bride, often attached to the family house. This could take weeks or even months. While the groom was away, the role of the bride was to beautify herself in preparation for her marriage. At a point in time, the groom would come and take to himself his wife, starting a week long party that would be celebrated by the town before the time of consummation. This is the language Jesus used. He is preparing a place in His Father's home for us and there will come a day that He will **"fetch to Himself His bride"**, which means that our role today is to prepare ourselves for that day, as He *"purifies for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works."* (Titus 2:14). He will return, and in His absence He gave us the Spirit to indwell us and purify ourselves, anticipating His coming, like the bride of a sailor who went off to war.

I've heard two different short-sighted, misunderstood statements concerning the resources God has given us, sufficient resources to live a joyful life to His glory. One is that the church has "too many Bible studies, we need to _____ more". One prominent church on the East coast said they do not want to be bogged down in doctrine, they wanted to focus on evangelism, on saving people, not teaching people. Not only is that a wrong way of thinking, it is an offensive one. The church is to **adorn the doctrine of God** (Titus 2:10) as we await our blessed hope, meaning that living out the truth makes God's grace beautiful! Also the church is the pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), which harkened to the beautiful ornamental pillars of temples. God's truth is true beauty, which means it is to be treasured, known, and displayed in the lives of those who believe. The second is that if we focus too much on heaven or the future we are no earthly good in the meantime. Heaven, being in the presence of Jesus and serving God without sin IS THE GOAL of all of this, the pinnacle of redemptive history. It's equivalent to focusing on engagement to a fiancé and NEVER thinking about, preparing for, or looking forward to the wedding. No matter how we spin it, engagements are at best tolerable (short engagements = good engagements!) The wedding with Jesus the goal, and that is the message of hope and encouragement He left His disciples.

A Revealing Question (5-8)

Luke 21:5-8 And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ⁷ And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" ⁸ And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them.

Surprising Statement about the Temple

We are now entering into Tuesday evening of the Passion Week. Jesus entered on Sunday to the adulation of the people, welcoming Him as the Messiah King. On Monday He obliged their hopes by cleansing the Temple, running out the corrupt money changers and infuriating the Sadducees who controlled the Temple and made huge profit. On Tuesday Jesus returned and began to teach against the false teaching and religion of the Pharisees, calling them out for taking advantage of widows and sealing the doors to the kingdom. As Jesus left the Temple Mount of Tuesday a few things were accomplished: 1) The Pharisees and Sadducees that made up the Sanhedrin were in agreement about the need to put Him to death; 2) This was the last time He would speak publicly to the crowds, since He threw down the gauntlet of following Him or the Pharisees, and the people chose the latter; 3) The house of Israel would be desolate, and the nation would not see Him again until they said "blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord (Matt. 23:38-39 - which points to the future); 4) He now turns His attention to His close friends and followers, preparing them for His immediate departure.

Jesus walked out of the Temple, crossed over the Kidron Valley and up onto the Mt. of Olives with His disciples, and sat down, gazing down at the massive Temple mount. It would be like going up to Griffith Observatory in the evening, looking out over downtown LA with its sprawling buildings and structures. The Temple was a wonder of the world. It was full of gold and marble, to the point that when you walked in and the sun gleamed off certain parts a worshipper could be blinded. People would leave offerings as they made vows to the Lord so it was not only full of treasures INSIDE, but was an aesthetic marvel on the outside. As they sat down, the disciples began to comment on the Temple, which had taken 50 years to build and would be continually under construction for the next 30 (like Disneyland). This was significant for the disciples since this would have been the center of Christ's rule in His kingdom, and you can only imagine their discussion, "this will all be ours when Jesus rules. What a perfect place to reign from".

However, Jesus popped their balloon right in their face. The days are coming that not stone would be left on top of another in this opulent edifice. What?! How could that be? How could that happen to such a structure? Why would that happen? When? So many questions would have flooded their minds.

Simple Questions about the future

The questions that they actually asked were simple enough: ***when will this happen, and what will the sign be when they take place*** (a third question was recorded in Matthew 24:3 pertaining to His return). In Jewish teaching, there was room for this destruction, and the disciples knew the prophecies of Zechariah 12 and 14 which pointed to this kind of action, but it is absolutely clear they were thinking that if the Temple were destroyed, Jesus would have built it back up in their lifetime. Two nights later they were still arguing about their placement in the kingdom that was expected momentarily, not millennia later.

Stated Purpose for His response

Jesus launched into a long discourse, His most comprehensive statements concerning the timing, sequence of events, and finality of His return recorded in the gospels. Matthew recorded it over multiple chapters (Matt. 24-25), while Luke recorded one long sentence. The **purpose** given by Jesus was that He did not want His disciples to be **led astray** or **be deceived**. One of the easiest ways to be deceived in life is to lack truth or proper information, or be confused by the information we do possess. He gave the disciples the amount of detail they would need to stand firm in the truth.

The problem of overvaluing the answers to these questions - As we look at what Jesus said about future events, there are several responses going on in your hearts. Some of you do not care about the sequence or detail of how and when Jesus will return, just want to focus on the fact that He will. Others may be confused by what you've read and are **unsure**. Still others may be infatuated with the study of these things, desiring to work out every detail and concluding in your mind in an absolute way every nuance of the events to come. While this is a noble path of study, we must be cautious that we do not go beyond what Scripture gave us. What I mean is this: we have been given all we need to be equipped and prepared, but there is still some level of mystery as to how it will ALL work out. We are convinced of a certain way Scripture lays these things out, but not so absolutely that we will divide over it, or break fellowship because of it. Future things were not given to us to argue and divide over, but to unite through the fact that Christ WILL RETURN.

The problem with undervaluing the answers to these questions - From a personal perspective, in my formative growing up years, I was a part of a church that not only interpreted future things *allegorically* (meaning that what is stated is not literal but represented something else), which left me confused and unmotivated, but I was part of a church split that had the fundamental dividing line an issue of future events. This caused me to run from the discussion, want little to do with detail, and wanting to let things happen the way they would happen whether I knew how or not. The problem with this thinking in my life and any of ours is this: **the truth of the future is fiercely practical to our walk with Christ today**. This is vital information for our perspective, hope, motivation, and encouragement. This is the heart of the message Jesus left His disciples, and what we walk through this morning. Let's look at the main points of how Jesus answered His disciples questions.

A Revealing Response (9-33)

Future

First off and most obviously, there was an emphasis by Jesus on what **WILL happen**. "Many WILL come (v. 8), Nation WILL RISE (v. 10), There WILL be great earthquakes and terrors (11), they WILL lay their hands on you and persecute you (12), this WILL be your opportunity to bear witness (13), you will be delivered up by parents (16) and will be hated by all (17) and by your endurance you will gain your lives (19). All of these events were to come in an indefinite time in the future, definitely for the disciples at the time and by extension for us into the future.

Now notice in verses 20-24 there is a statement of Jerusalem being surrounded by enemies and near **desolation**. There are two historical reference points for these. The first is in 167 BC when a Greek king from the Seleucid empire came into Jerusalem and dedicate the Temple to Zeus and sacrificed a pig on the altar, both obvious offensive and heinous acts of abomination on the temple mount. This was not only an act of personal triumph but of persecution to the Maccabee's after their revolt against Hellenism and Greek rule. This happened over a century before this prophecy of Jesus and though it was an abomination, there is still one coming as was recorded in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. There will be a day in the future where desolation will come near when there is one with a cup full of abominations is unleashed (Revelation 17:4)

The other was the rebellion of Jews in Judea against Rome starting in 66 AD, which led to the final destruction in 70 AD. Vespasian had become emperor in Rome and sent his son Titus to land the final blow in Jerusalem starting in 69 AD. After a siege of the city and knocking down the walls with battering rams, the people of the city were slaughtered and though Titus did not command the Temple destroyed, a fire began and the precious jewels and gold of the Temple was stripped away. The Temple was razed to the ground with not one stone upon another, just as Jesus had said. The irony is that work on the Temple ended 6 years earlier, reaching a place of "completion". There was a slaughter of 600,000 people and a dispersion of the nation throughout the world, and by 73 AD all marks of a self-ruling Jewish nation had disappeared.

Some have taken this destruction to be the final fulfillment of this prophecy (formally called *Preterism*). While there is clear fulfillment in this timeline, it does not mean this prophecy was **filled full**. In other words, not all that Jesus spoke *has* come to pass: nations had not risen against nation, the great signs in the sky and over the earth, and the times of the Gentiles have not been fulfilled (v. 24 - the time from 586 B.C until Revelation 20). This means that though *some* of this has come to pass, there will still be things happening in the future. Just as we have had wars, tumults, plagues and famines since the day Jesus left, there are things still coming that will be an intensity this world has NEVER seen.

Physical (Literal)

The second point of clarity Jesus brought was the fact that all of these signs and timing leading into His return were LITERAL, they were really going to happen on this earth. Zechariah 14:4 says that Jesus will return with His feet on the Mount of Olives, the same place that He was prophesying with the disciples. None of the language Jesus gave His disciples was symbolic, though He spoke with analogy like He had done so often before, when He gave the picture of the fig tree and its leaves. In other words, where Jesus was giving word pictures, we understand the metaphor. When He spoke of wars, persecution, and armies, he meant all of that literally. Jesus WILL return in bodily form. Though Jesus did not say everything that we have (see Daniel 9-12; Zechariah 12-14, Revelation, etc), the point was NOT that these things would not happen, but that there would be a progression of them happening.

Progressive

Not only are these things future, but they will happen in a progressive, undeniable way. He said there would be rumors of things happening *before* the end draws near, but that the end would not take place all at once, but would be progressive. Matthew 24:8 and Mark 13:8 compares the beginning stages of the end "**birth pains**", which is a vivid and appropriate picture. When labor pains start, you know things are close, but it also means there will be a ramping up process (for some more than others - and this was before epidurals and C-Sections!) Notice there would be some great signs from heaven (11), but these would still be of the natural variety. This would lead to growing persecution, where even family members are given over to death, hatred of believers will be normative, and those that endure will be saved.

After this there will be **great distress on the earth and wrath against the people** (23) after Jerusalem is surrounded and its inhabitants flee. This will result in massive death and many captives trampled.

AFTER this, there will be GREAT COSMIC SIGNS in sun, moon, and stars, and there will be a reaction from people because of what happened to the waves in the sea, and the end will be near. Then Jesus said that He would come **in a cloud with power and glory**.

Now we believe that will happen AFTER the church is gone following the rapture (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18), and these events will take place over the 7 year period of the Tribulation, which will culminate in the return of Jesus to establish an Kingdom on this earth (Rev. 20). Some will undoubtedly believe something different (which is ok), but the fact remains that Jesus gave this information for a purpose.

Joyful yet Sorrowful

For those that are believers (or became believers during the Tribulation), the return of Jesus would be reason to **lift up and raise their heads**, knowing that redemption is near. For believers, the appearance of Jesus is something to **anticipate, not dread**. It is what the believers in Thessalonica understood about their life in Christ, turning from idols to serve the living God and **to wait for His appearing** (1 Thess. 1:9-10). But for those who do not believe, Jesus' return would be a time of great sorrow and judgment, as those who refused to bow their knee would be punished and those whose names were not written in the book of life would be cast into the lake of fire. A mixture of joy and sorrow will be held at His return.

After this, Jesus answered the first question: **when?** He said just like one knows summer is near when a fig tree gets its leaf, when these things happen, you know the **kingdom of God is near**, the physical reign of Christ on the earth. The earth will be purified in fire and will give way to a New Heaven and New Earth (2 Peter 3:1-10; Rev. 21-22). All of this will take place when the Father deems it (Matt. 24:36), when His timing is complete. It is not for us to figure it out, but it is important for us to be ready.

A Revealing Command (34-36)

Luke 21:34-36 "But **watch yourselves** lest your **hearts** be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and **cares of this life**, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But **stay awake** at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Watch yourselves

Since we do not know when the start of all of this will take place (we believe the rapture of the church will NOT be preceded by a sign, which means it could happen ANY time), what commands are left for us? Jesus gave **two present active imperatives**, which simply means that these are things that are commanded to do in an ongoing, active way. The first is to **watch ourselves**, to give attention to our own hearts and minds. Our view of Jesus' return is absolutely tied in with how we view life in the present.

Notice how this information helps us everyday. Our hearts can be weighed down and burdened with the "stuff" of life: trials, circumstances, hardships, affliction, pain, suffering...you get the picture. There are three responses to this given: **dissipation** - which means indulging in all that life offers, living practically like Jesus will never return and this life being all that there is; **drunkenness** - a numbing of our senses so that we do not have to deal with the pain of life; **anxiety or care of this life** - a worry about what will happen tomorrow or if there will be enough today; it carries a burden that only God can and puts us in a place only God possesses. Jesus said that though His return will be a trap for those who did not love His appearing, it is NOT a trap for us. We KNOW Jesus is returning, so we prepare ourselves by living **holy and obedient lives**, NOT to gain salvation but because salvation has already been given. We don't numb ourselves with drunkenness, but can match our pain in the present with the joy of Jesus' presence that is ours now and in the future. We do not need to worry about the future because as sure as Jesus came the first time, **HE WILL COME AGAIN FOR HIS OWN!**

Stay awake

Not only are we to watch ourselves, we are to stay awake at all times. Its so easy to get lulled into apathy concerning Christ's return. Matthew gives the example of the days of Noah (Matthew 24:36-40) when people were eating and drinking and marrying, and were caught unaware when the rains came (even though they saw a big boat being built). We get lulled into thinking that the end will never come,

or that life now is more important, or we simply love this world more than Jesus. We get sleepy thinking about money, retirement, vacation, comfort, and pleasure rather than anticipating the sure and coming appearance of Jesus.

What is the antidote? Prayer. This prayer is not for things or requests for material possession, but prayers that both long for Christ's return (Maranatha - Lord come quickly) and that we would be prepared for it - that we would escape the punishment reserved for those under His wrath and longing for His personal appearing. This is the test case for all of us: do we long to see Jesus, to be with Him, to see Him for who He is? The disciples were focused on what they could receive in the Kingdom coming, and Jesus reminded them that standing before the Son of Man is the point.

“Christ must be explicit in all our God-talk. It will not do, in this day of pluralism, to talk about the glory of God in vague ways. God without Christ is no God. And a no-God cannot save or satisfy the soul. Following a no-God — whatever his name or whatever his religion — will be a wasted life. God-in-Christ is the only true God and the only path to joy.” (Don’t Waste Your Life, page 38)

So do you long for the return of Christ, or are we lulled to sleep by so many other things? Does this knowledge help us stay watchful and awake, or has our heart grown cold towards these things? Do we long for our bridegroom returning so that we can get on with marriage, or are we content being perpetually engaged?