

“Your Redemption Is Drawing Near”: Jesus’ Words on the End of the World (Part 4)

Introduction

The Text

⁵ 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. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

²⁰ “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:5–28)

Part 4

- A. Remember this is now Part 4 of our trek through this section of [Luke 21](#) commonly referred to as the Olivet Discourse.
1. Jesus’ disciples here, you may recall, are asking about the destruction of the temple Jesus just prophesied and the consequent end of the world they then anticipate.

- B. We've said in messages past that one of the interpretive keys to unlocking the complexity of this passage is to recognize that Jesus sees in the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem—which came to pass in 70 A.D. just as He predicted—a foreshadowing, a typological preview of the final judgement that's coming for all on the last day at the end of the age.
- C. This morning our focus, in particular, is on [vv. 25-28](#). And, it's important to note up front that it's at this point, it seems to me, that the center of gravity shifts a bit from content that leans more towards the destruction of the temple towards content that is now, in my estimation at least, much more concerned with the end of the age in particular.
 - 1. And so this also shall be our focus in particular this morning. The end of the world—a subject perhaps you've been thinking more about in recent days; a subject regarding which Jesus has much to say and with which Jesus has much to do.
- D. So let's get to work. I'll come at [vv. 25-28](#) by asking four questions: (1) Who Is Coming?; (2) How Is He Coming?; (3) Why Is He Coming?; and (4) What About Us?
 - 1. It seems straight forward enough, perhaps, but In every case, it seems to me, the answer is not exactly what we would expect.

(1) Who Is Coming?

The Son of Man?

- A. It is wonderfully coincidental that here at the start of Advent, where we remember and celebrate Jesus' first coming, we get to talk about Jesus' second advent and the longing that we ought to have for His return.
- B. But I should say that regarding this first question, I'm sure most of you are thinking, "Isn't it obvious? Jesus is coming."
 - 1. To which I'd respond, "Yes, of course, that is true." But there's a lot more here, though admittedly it is a bit veiled at first.
- C. You see, in [v. 27](#), Jesus doesn't just say: "And then they will see Me coming in a cloud with power and great glory." No, that's not quite it, is it. Instead He says: "[And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.](#)"
 - 1. "[The Son of Man](#)"—who is that?; what does this mean?
 - a. On the surface at least it seems such a strange title does it not? If we were to take it to someone unschooled in the Scriptures, surely the common sense understanding would be that the Son of Man is just a reference to a human being.

- i. And this is certainly partly what Jesus hopes to emphasize about Himself here, but if we stop at that, we've really missed the fullness of what He's trying to communicate.
- D. Perhaps this is why, though, this title represents that which Jesus most often ascribes to Himself.
 - 1. Other people call Him Rabbi, or Master, or Teacher, or Christ, or Lord.
 - 2. But He prefers to call Himself the Son of Man.
 - a. On the one hand, it shows His solidarity with humanity. And people without ears to hear might think that's all there is to it.
 - b. But, on the other hand, if one really considers what He is saying, and searches the Scriptures in this regard, they would discern it points also to His divinity and His mission to save the world.

Daniel 7

- A. The title, while used throughout the OT to refer to mere human beings, in one place in particular comes to take on much more significance.
 - 1. In [Dan 7](#), Daniel has this dream where one by one these four frightening, monstrous beasts begin to rise out from the sea. One like a lion, another like a bear, another like a leopard, and one so magnificently wretched it can't even be likened to any earthly creature.
 - a. Well, we come to find that these beasts each represent various kings and their corresponding kingdoms. History, as it were, will be fraught with violence and wickedness and injustice superintended by beastly, animal-like rulers and authorities.
- B. But, then, suddenly, at the close of Daniel's vision, in breaks the Ancient of Days, YHWH, God, and He's come to judge the beasts and bring an end to their reigns of terror.
 - 1. And we're told of these thrones, more than one, set up there in heaven, and, suddenly Daniel sees One coming "with the clouds of heaven," "one like a son of man" (v. 13a). And we're told that " ¹³ [H]e came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve [and worship] him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (vv. 13-14).
 - a. The beasts shall be thrown down and done away with. But this Son of Man shall sit down on the throne there with God and reign forever!

Gen 1-3

- A. To fully appreciate what Daniel is seeing here and what Jesus is thereby alluding to, we have to go back to the opening pages of our Bibles, to [Gen 1-3](#).

1. You remember, perhaps, that God made man in His image, male and female He made them. And He gave them the world to rule over on His behalf—“have dominion,” He says, “over the fish, and the birds, and the beasts” (cf. [Gen 1:26](#)).
 - a. But they don’t rule over the beasts, do they? No, instead they become like the beasts, something less than human. They acquiesce to animal instincts, to self-oriented pleasures, to mere bodily appetites, to the lusts of the flesh, and things like this.

- B. But now here is something I doubt you’ve noticed, because we always picture Satan taking on the form of a snake here. Now, while we cannot be sure just what this “serpent” was before it was cursed to go about on its belly and eat dust ([Gen 3:14](#)), one thing we can know for sure: it was called a “beast.”
 1. It’s right there in the English of [Gen 3:1](#): “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast . . .”
 - a. And this beast, animated by Satan as it was, gets the upper hand over Adam and Eve . . . and over every subsequent king and kingdom . . . and even over us.

- C. And that’s why Jesus has come. And that’s why He’s come as a Son of Man, as a human being. He’s come to stand where Adam and Eve fell. He’s come to rule over the beasts and put an end to the evil and oppression.
 1. This is what He’s doing in the wilderness when He too would be tempted by the serpent, tempted towards bestial instincts, to use His power for selfish gain and immediate gratification, and yet He would resist and rule over it.
 2. This is why straight from here in [Luke 21](#) we’re told in the opening verses of [Luke 22](#), that “Satan entered into Judas” (v. 3). The devil is getting ready for combat.
 - a. Jesus, the Son of Man, is the truly human one come to confront and conquer the beast.

- D. That’s what He’s saying is coming in full when He returns. He’s going to put an end to all that’s wrong with the world.
 1. So in [Rev 19](#), He shows up on a white horse with a sword coming forth from His mouth, and John tells us: “¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.²⁰ And the beast was captured, and . . . thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur” (vv. 19–20).
 - a. And out from the ashes, Jesus is bringing a new humanity, a new world order, a new kingdom under a new and, at last, good King!

Sin Is Crouching

- A. Now, if I could make a simple point of application on this. I was struck by the image of Satan as a beast and sin, therefore, as something beastly.
1. In fact, after Adam and Eve fall, God, warning Adam's son Cain, describes sin in beastly terms. He says: "[sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it](#)" (Gen. 4:7). It's pictured as a beast hungry, lurking, hunting, looking to prey on . . . you!
- B. And I want us to get that. When we are tempted towards sin, one of the biggest problems is we just go right on with it . . . like animals. We don't even discern the war that's taking place. "I feel, I want, I do."
1. But when you slow down, when you stop and think, you can almost hear Satan's voice, you can almost smell the devil's breath. He invites us to be something beastly.
 - a. "Go ahead, click on that image, devour that woman on the screen like an object; go ahead let your spouse have an earful, he deserves it, she deserves it; go ahead, have another drink and another and another. Don't be a human being reflecting God's image in the world. Be a beast! Get whatever you want in the way you want whenever you want."
 - i. It's an invitation for us to devour others like animals, but in it we are devoured ourselves!
- C. There's a war there. And the call is: "Don't give in! Don't be an animal. You were created for so much more. Rule over it!"
1. Cain did not. In a jealous rage, like a beast he brutalized his brother Abel.
 2. But, in Christ, we can!

(2) How Is He Coming?

The Glory Cloud of God's Presence

- A. Now, how is He coming? We're told He's coming "[in a cloud](#)" (v. 27)—and it's that little detail that I wanted to consider with you for a moment.
- B. Again, it's perhaps not exactly what we would think.
1. We hear of a Son of Man is coming and we think of someone merely human, but come to find He's also divine and an eternal King.
 2. So now, we hear of this cloud and some of us may think of something like the care bears or Mary Poppins—you know how she just kind of glides down to earth in this peaceful sort of fashion. It has this ethereal, fantastical sort of feel to it right. Jesus is coming in a cloud. How cute.

- a. But again, when once we consider this idea in the context of the whole of Scripture, so much more comes out.
- C. Let me show you something of the deep roots beneath this cloud imagery in the Scriptures.
- 1. The cloud, if you recall, was in fact one of the ways God manifested His presence and His glory to the people of Israel. In fact, this cloud was so significant to them, they gave it a name: the Shekinah, from the Hebrew word shakhan meaning “to dwell”—because this glory-cloud-presence of God represented His dwelling with them.
 - a. So we recall, that when God is leading people out from Egypt in the Exodus, He goes before them in the day as a cloud: “[T]he LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way” (Ex. 13:21).
 - b. And you remember when the Law was given on Mount Sinai, how God’s glory-presence on the top was signified by a cloud: Ex 19:16: “On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.”
 - c. And at the end of the book of Exodus, when they finish construction of the tabernacle, what happens? Well, we’re told that “³⁴ the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34–35).
 - d. And we read of the very same thing when later in Jerusalem they transition from the mobile structure of tabernacle to the more permanent fixture of the temple (cf. 2 Chr 5:13-14).
- D. But the point is this: It’s God’s presence with them. That’s what the cloud represents. His glory-presence.
- 1. I mean, we’ve already seen as much even in the gospel of Luke itself. You remember the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus brings up with Him Peter, James, and John, and there He’s transfigured before them, glowing, resplendent. And while all this is happening, God shows up.
 - a. How do we know? Well, we read: “³⁴ a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!’” (Luke 9:34–35).
- E. God, His presence signified by the cloud. And Jesus here says I’m coming “in a cloud” (v. 27). What is He saying? I’m bringing the fullness of God’s presence back to earth, restoring the relationship between God and man.

Fulfilling the Temple

- A. You know, it's interesting that all of this comes out in context of Jesus' discussion of destroying the temple.
 - 1. I hope you see, He has nothing against the temple in itself. It's just becoming obsolete in God's plan of redemption.
 - a. God never meant for us to have to travel to some building to find Him. He intended to dwell with man wherever we are at all times.
- B. And that is what Jesus is saying He's finally going to realize in full at the end. It's not the destruction of the temple that is the main point here but the fulfillment of it.
 - 1. This is why when John is given the measurements of the New Jerusalem in [Rev 21](#), it's a perfect cube: "Its length and width and height are equal" (v. 16).
 - a. Well, that's a very strange little detail. How anticlimactic to bring out a ruler at this point and measure things. Why would this matter?
 - i. Because, if you ever noticed, in the architecture of the temple, the Holy of Holies was also a perfect cube.
- C. Ah, now we see it! In the age to come our whole existence in the new heavens and new earth will be like living in the Holy of Holies.
 - 1. It's not just the High Priest once a year or something like this.
 - 2. It's everyone all the time. God with man. That's the point here. That's what Jesus is coming again to accomplish in full.
 - a. This is not Mary Poppins coming down from some fluffy cloud. This is God come to dwell forever with man.

(3) Why Is He Coming?

Destruction?

- A. On this question, of course, I've been alluding to it all along the way, so we can't spend too much time here. But I did again want to bring out perhaps the unexpected nature of the answer when at least we look at the text before us.
 - 1. It all sounds a bit frightening, does it not? Look at [Luke 21:25-26](#) again: " ²⁵ And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Whatever this is, I'm not sure I want to have any part of it.

- B. You really do get the sense that all of creation is ripping apart at the seams here. There's a sort of un-creating going on. And I do think that's part of the point. The world is receding back into chaos.
 - 1. You remember it started as such back in [Gen 1](#), and God brought order out from it. He established boundaries and realms for the heavens and the earth and the sea, and the chaos was tamed.
 - 2. But now each of these realms is seemingly coming out of order and falling apart.
 - a. Whether this is figurative language, or literal, or both in some sense . . . we get the point. This place is being un-created, to put it nicely. To put it bluntly, it's being destroyed.
- C. And this is why I say we look at first and seem to find no good news here at all. It sounds horrible.

Redemption

- A. But this is when we must consider what Jesus says at the end there in [v. 28](#): “[Y]our redemption is drawing near.”
- B. Judgment, destruction, doesn't get the last word here. Redemption does. This isn't just un-creation. This is re-creation, new creation. Jesus isn't throwing away the world here, He is renewing it, He is restoring it.
 - 1. This is what Peter is talking about in [Acts 3:21](#) when he says that Jesus will remain with His Father in heaven “until the time for restoring all the things.” Then He's coming back. That's what this is. The restoring of all things is about to take place.
 - 2. This is what Peter also writes about in [2 Pet 3](#), where he mentions judgment is coming, and this place is going to burn, but the end result isn't destruction and annihilation. No! [V. 13](#): “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” All the wrong will be made right.
 - 3. It's what John sees in [Rev 21](#): “¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (vv. 1–2). A new heavens, a new earth, a new Jerusalem. That's what Jesus is coming to do. To make all things new!
 - a. And just to be clear, it's not the sort of new like we talk about on Christmas morning with our gifts and things. You get a new toy, you get a new coffee maker, you get a new sweatshirt or something. All that stuff, you're bored with it, it's broken by the next year. It's in a bag to be given to Goodwill because it already feels old.
 - i. That's not the kind of new we're talking about here. This is an eternal new. The sort of newness that keeps the soul ever-engaged, ever-alive, ever-satisfied. It's the sort of thing every human heart is longing for . . .

Satisfaction

- A. C.S. Lewis, reflecting on this sort of thing, famously wrote the following in his *Mere Christianity*: “Most of us find it very difficult to want ‘Heaven’ . . . except in so far as ‘Heaven’ means meeting again our friends who have died. One reason for this difficulty is that we have not been trained: our whole education tends to fix our minds on this world. Another reason is that when the real want for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. I am not now speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us.
- . . . Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire that no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (135-137).
- B. And it’s that world that Jesus is, here in our text, ushering in! It’s the world where at last the deepest longings in your heart find their satisfaction. True and full experience of God and love and life and pleasure. Not just a ringing echo, but the real thing!

(4) What About Us?

Judgement Day . . . a Good Day?

- A. But now we must ask: What about us? Where are we in all of this? What are we to do? How should we be responding?
1. I’ve already mentioned the fact that it seems to us at first read that we should be terrified. After all, it does seem there are many who are just that. You noticed it, didn’t you? Jesus speaks of the “distress of nations” (v. 25) and “people fainting with fear and foreboding” (v. 26).
 - a. It doesn’t sound good. And clearly there are some for whom it will not be good.
- B. So why am I painting it in such a positive light? And how can Jesus come down again there in v. 28 and say to His disciples: “Now when you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads . . .”? How can this be a day of destruction for some but a day of redemption for others?
- C. I thought of what I’ve Tim Keller say about judgment day at this point: “If there is no judgment day there’s no hope for the world (because God alone can make all the wrong right, bring things to justice, do away with evil and oppression, etc.) but if there is a judgment day there’s no hope for me

(because I deserve judgment for my own participation in the wrong and the injustice and the evil and oppression).”

1. The coming of God in power and glory is not a good thing for sinners. Didn't you catch that? Even back in those texts about the shekinah cloud, we saw it, right? The cloud shows up and the people are trembling. And rightly so.

- a. God says to Moses in [Exo 19:21](#): “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish.”

- D. So, again, how is this good? Why should I be straightening up and lifting my head instead of fainting in fear? How is this my redemption? Why would I not also be destroyed?

The Cross of Christ!

- A. It all comes down to what Jesus is about to undergo on the cross in a few short days, doesn't it?

1. In [Luke 21:25](#), we're told that on that day “there will be signs in sun and moon and stars . . .”

- a. And then in [Luke 23:44-45](#), while Jesus is hanging there on the cross, we read: “⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed.”

2. In [Luke 21:26](#), we're told that the cataclysm will be so dramatic that even the “powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

- a. And then in [Matt 27:51](#) we're told that, as Jesus breathed His last, “the earth shook, and the rocks were split”—so much so that curtain of the temple was torn in two, and the tombs of local cemeteries, as it were, were rattled and rent open.

- B. What is happening here? Well, it's as simple to see as it is profound, indeed, it is something I brought out last time as well: namely, Jesus is taking our judgment upon Himself. He's dying for my sin and yours.

1. The glory-cloud of God that should have surrounded and protected and celebrated Him as the only righteous Son of God and Son of Man, turns on Him. And He's forced to face the fury of a Holy God's wrath against the sins of the world.

- a. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” ([Matt 27:46](#)).

- i. I'll tell you why. So that God doesn't have to forsake me. Judgment day comes in early for Him there on the cross so that it can go well for you and I if we would turn and trust in Him.

- C. This accounts for difference in response—why some are struck with fear and foreboding, and why others are straightening up with anticipation and excitement.

1. You see, the former rolled the dice on a bet that God was just a fairytale and Jesus wasn't coming and they could live like beasts with their appetites and sins here and now. And they were wrong. They're going to have to face the glory of God on their own. They're going to have to pay for what they've done. And they will perish.
 2. But the latter, they pushed all their chips in on Jesus. They trusted, not in themselves to make it through judgement, but in Christ, His blood to ransom and redeem them. They've already faced judgment in Him. His Spirit's already at work in them to renew them in the Father's image. All that's left is the fullness of salvation, eternal life, and everlasting joy!
- D. At Christmas, Jesus comes first in weakness and humility so that we don't have to fear him when he comes again in power and majesty. Have you embraced Him?!