

Luke 21:5ff The Olivet Discourse, part 2

I read recently that at least seven men around the world claim to be Jesus Christ reincarnated, and some of them have a large following of devoted disciples.¹

One such individual claiming to be Jesus is a retired Siberian traffic cop. Another is a Zambian taxi driver. A former waiter from Brazil claims to be Jesus. A former politician in Japan claims to be Jesus. I assume that there are many others who make similar claims.

I am confident that none of us would even remotely consider the claims of any of these pretend Jesuses. The only people who could be led astray by false Jesuses are those who do not know the true Jesus.

And anyone who knows the Bible knows that a series of monumental events will precede the 2nd Coming of Christ. These events have not yet happened, and Jesus has not returned. The events of the Great Tribulation have not yet occurred. So it's obvious that anyone claiming to be Jesus is an antichrist. We hope that Jesus will return soon. When he returns, there will be no doubt in anyone's mind who is the real Jesus.

The passage we're looking at today reveals much about what will happen before the 2nd Coming of Christ.

We began our study of Luke 21, a passage often titled "The Olivet Discourse," a couple of weeks ago. Last time we looked at vss. 5-7, in which Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple (point I).

The temple was an architectural wonder and its size and location dominated Jerusalem. To the Jews, nothing was as magnificent as their temple. So the disciples were rather proud of this impressive structure.

.6 But it would all come tumbling down. Jesus said that "*not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.*"

.7 The disciples asked when this would happen and what would be the sign of it happening.

¹<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/seven-men-around-the-world-who-each-claim-to-be-jesus-christ/2W27IHL7PIQLTO5SFAPPAMN5HM/#:~:text=At%20least%20seven%20men%20around,be%20the%20son%20of%20God.>

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, some of these prophecies were fulfilled not long after Jesus spoke them, and some remain to be fulfilled in the future—they have not yet been fulfilled.

The point of all of this is that believers must prepare for Jesus' return by living righteously.

I. Jesus discusses the signs of the times. .8-11

Jesus reveals three primary things that would happen in the future:

A. .8 False Christs would arise.

The word “antichrist” literally means “instead of Christ.” These false Christs would come along and draw followers after them. But disciples should know better than to follow the false Christs.

B. .9-10 International conflict would occur. Wars, commotions, nations against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms.

.9b Note the language—“these things **must** (δεῖ) first come to pass.” This is all part of God’s plan. God’s blueprint requires these things to happen. These are not random, chance events; they are required to fulfill God’s sovereign plan.

App: We should not be surprised that the news is filled with these kinds of events. This kind of chaos is somewhat normal in our world.

Although current events might seem chaotic and random, we know that God is using them to move history in a certain direction. God’s plan must come to pass, and he is providentially controlling events to guarantee his chosen outcome.

C. .11 Natural disasters and cosmic signs would be seen.

Earthquakes, famines, pestilences, fearful sights and signs will happen. That’s what we see almost every day in the headlines.

D. .9end These kind of events will characterize the time before the coming of Christ. The words “by and by” (εὐθέως) could be translated “immediately.” The end of the age is *not* signaled by such events. These kinds of things will be common in the time leading up to the end.

Mark records Jesus as describing these events as “the beginning of sorrows,” literally, “birth pangs.” Such sorrows will get noticeably worse and more severe as the end draws near.

App: Vs. 8 tells us not to be deceived, and vs. 9 tells us not to be terrified/frightened by these things. False Christs, wars, revolutions, and natural calamities are *not* signs that the end is coming “immediately.” We should expect all of these things as a normal part of life before Jesus returns.

App: We are suffering quite a bit of upset, conflict, and commotion right now. Does that mean that the end is near? No, it means that things are happening as normal. We could wish for greater stability and peace, but we shouldn’t expect it. Things are only going to get worse before they get better.

Trans: Speaking of things getting worse...

III. Jesus predicts severe persecution and opposition against believers. .12-19

Note that (.12) “before all these” things happen, believers will be subject to serious persecution. This entire section, from vs. 12-24, predicts dreadful persecution against believers.

A. .12 Both Jews and Gentiles would persecute believers, both the leaders of the synagogues and the kings and rulers of the nations.

B. .13 But their arrest and mistreatment would serve as an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. Trials and persecution often present opportunities to proclaim the truth.

Cf. Phil 1:12-18 – Paul’s imprisonment actually furthered the Gospel message.

Some of us sitting here today may experience severe persecution. Many believers around the world are currently experiencing this very kind of thing. The end of our way of life may not be far off.

C. .14-15 The Holy Spirit would give them wisdom to speak in a way in which the adversaries could not resist. Those undergoing such trials must rely upon God to give them the words to say to defend themselves.

D. .16-17 Even members of families will betray one another to death.

Even among professing believers, some will turn away from the faith under the threat of persecution. Treachery and betrayal will be common, and some believers will be put to death.

E. .18 Still, those who suffer persecution for Christ will not ultimately lose anything of spiritual significance.

1. He just said that some of them would be put to death—vs. 16end. So vs. 18 might seem like a contradiction—how can disciples be put to death, yet “not a hair of your head perish”?
2. They can kill the body but not the soul. The language here is referring to perishing eternally or ultimately. The persecutors might kill believers, but they could not do any damage to their souls.

Hebrews 13:6 *we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”*

- F. .19 Endurance/patience will be required in those days. Both Matthew and Mark say, “He who endures to the end will be saved.” So we must endure through this difficult time.

“possess ye your souls” – other translations have “you will gain your lives.” Endurance through persecution is evidence of genuine spiritual life.

We believe that God will exempt believers from the outpouring of the wrath of God on the earth during the time of the Tribulation. But we will *not* be exempt from the terrible things that will happen before the Tribulation. We should not be surprised by hardship or persecution. We must persevere through the difficulties of this life.

Ac 14:22 ... *We must through many tribulations [hardships] enter the kingdom of God.*

- IV. Jesus predicts the abomination of desolation and associated events. .20-24

These verses seem to apply to both the near and remote future, i.e., to the events of AD 70 (the destruction of Jerusalem) and to end times events.

- A. .20 Luke calls it “the desolation,” while the other Gospel writers call it the “abomination of desolation,” or “abomination that causes desolation.”

1. The word “abomination” suggests something repugnant to God, while “desolation” suggests that something will cause the temple to be deserted and left desolate.
2. The fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy of the “abomination that causes desolation” (cf. Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) is usually found historically in the desecration of the altar of burnt offering in the temple of Jerusalem in 167 BC.

Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king, set up an altar to the Greek god Zeus in the temple and sacrificed a pig on it, thereby defiling the temple.

3. The appearing of the “abomination of desolation” again is the one true sign that the end is very near. My understanding is that it will occur half way through the Tribulation when the Antichrist comes into the temple and demands that people worship him.

B. .24 Jerusalem will be “trodden down” by the Gentiles during the “times of the Gentiles.”

1. Historically, Gentiles dominated Israel from the time of Nebuchadnezzar (6th century BC) until very recently. The Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans all dominated the Promised Land until centuries after Jesus.
2. In the 7th century, the Muslims invaded and became dominant for many centuries.
3. But we are still in the “times of the Gentiles,” even though many Jews now live in Israel again. So perhaps this is a hint that, when the Jews gain control Israel and Jerusalem, the times of the Gentiles is coming to an end. Israel as a nation was reconstituted in 1948.

Interesting cross reference: Rom 11:25 ... *blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.*

We should expect the Gentiles to dominate Israel and Jerusalem until the time of the 2nd Coming of Christ.

C. The language of these verses, though fulfilled partially in the terrible events that occurred at the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, looks forward to the Great Tribulation. They summarize what the days will be like before the Second Coming—which is the next thing that Jesus predicts.

V. Jesus predicts his Second Coming. .25-28

What happens next will mark the end of the times of the Gentiles. Something new is about to happen. Jesus is no longer talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Now he’s going to describe end times events.

A. .25 The coming of the Son of Man will be associated with abnormal events in the atmosphere. The imagery and language are derived from the OT descriptions of the Day of the Lord.

1. The repeated assertion in Scripture that the end times will be accompanied by cosmic disturbances. Such events demonstrate the judgment of God upon the world.
2. Accompanying these heavenly disturbances will be “perplexity” among the nations. Shaking in the heavens will be accompanied by shaking on the earth.
3. Regarding the “sea and waves roaring” – in biblical prophecy the sea often symbolizes chaos or fear.²

Isaiah 17:12 Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; And to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!

B. .27 These cosmic and earthly signs all point to the same thing—Jesus is “coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

1. Jesus draws his language here from Daniel 7, where one like the Son of Man descends in the clouds of heaven and was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. All people, languages, and nations will serve him, and his reign will never end.
2. People will see Jesus descend from the clouds in great majesty. Jesus came the first time as a lowly Suffering Servant, despised and rejected by men. When he comes the second time, he will come in triumph—“with great power and glory.” The Second Coming will be personal, visible, and glorious.

Acts 1:11 ... this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Anyone claiming to be Jesus must descend from the clouds in great glory and power. No one has done that. When Jesus does it, everyone will see it.

² Walter L. Liefeld, “Luke,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 1022.

- C. .28 When things like this begin to happen, realize that the 2nd Coming is near. Believers should be able to discern the significance of the events leading up to the Great Tribulation.
- D. .28 As we see these things occurring, we must “lift up your heads,” i.e., straighten up and look expectantly to the fulfillment of Jesus’ promises. We don’t cower in fear and trembling; we lift our gaze to heaven and stand up straight in the face of persecution and chaos.

App: That’s the kind of attitude we need to have today—straighten up, lift your gaze to heaven, and be prepared to stand strongly against persecution and chaos.

VI. Jesus relates the Parable of the Fig Tree (.29-31)

- A. .29 The point is that when we see such things happening, we will know the “kingdom of God is near.”
- B. How near is it? We have no way of knowing. In fact, Jesus said that no one knows the day or the hour of his return. If anyone claims to know, we know that he is a false prophet.
- C. As we observe world events, it certainly looks a lot like what Jesus describes here as the “birth pangs” that will culminate in Jesus’ return.
- D. When we see the events described in vss. 25-26, that’s a pretty good indicator that the time is short.

VII. Jesus offers assurances and exhortations. .32-36

A. Assurances

- 1. .32 This generation will not pass away until all these things come to pass.
 - a) This is the most controversial statement in the entire Olivet Discourse. Did Jesus mean that those listening to him at that point in history—his generation—would still be alive when he returned?
 - b) How do we understand this word “generation”? A “generation” in the Bible can refer to a span of time or a class or category of people.
 - (1) **If** Jesus is referring to a span of time that a group of people lived, then he’s saying that all of these things would happen within about 40 years. Of course, a lot of it did happen within 40 years. The

Romans destroyed Jerusalem within the lives of that generation, so they saw some of these things happen; some of this was fulfilled historically.

- (2) **If** Jesus saying that all of these things would happen within the lifetime of those listening to him at that point in history, we have a real problem, because Jesus did *not* return in great power and glory. He did not descend in the clouds and establish an eternal kingdom within that generation.
- (3) **If** “generation” refers to a class or category of people, then “this generation” could refer to the generation of people who will be alive at that time, when Christ returns. This generation will see these events.

Quote: The point is that the generation who sees those signs begin will see the consummation of all things.³ Everything will be fulfilled within the generation that sees the events of the End beginning to occur.⁴

So my understanding is that the generation alive at the time that these final signs appear will live to see the 2nd Coming of Christ.

2. .32end However it all works out, we can be assured that all of this will be fulfilled. The sovereign power of God will guarantee that all of this will happen.

App: We’ve been waiting for a long time for these prophecies to be fulfilled. But we have God’s guarantee that all of this will happen just as Jesus predicts it here.

³ Ray M. Wenger, “Hermeneutical Keys to the Olivet Discourse: Part 2: Lukan Eschatology (Luke 21),” *Journal of Dispensational Theology (Spring–Winter)* 18, no. 53 (2014): 51–52.

⁴ Ray M. Wenger, “Hermeneutical Keys to the Olivet Discourse: Part 2: Lukan Eschatology (Luke 21),” *Journal of Dispensational Theology (Spring–Winter)* 18, no. 53 (2014): 64.

3. .33 Jesus' words are more certain than heaven and earth; they will not pass away. I.e., they will not be found to be in error; they will be fulfilled.

App: In times of upset and upheaval, we have a reliable, unchanging foundation—the Word of God. The words of Jesus are more reliable than anything else in this shifting, chaotic world.

B. .34-36 exhortations

1. Our main responsibility as we await the 2nd Coming is to “watch and pray.” Carefully observe world events and be faithful in your spiritual obligations.
2. He mentions a couple of things that could prevent us from being ready for Jesus' return.
 - a) .34 “surfeiting”—not surfing; this word refers to the results of drunkenness. So he's referring to carousing or partying, indulging in worldly pleasures. Some are so engaged in pleasure and excitement that they fail to see the signs of Jesus' return.
 - b) .34 Cares of this life—some are working so hard that they don't notice what's going on. We can become so entangled with earthly events that we fail to notice the signs of the times.
 - c) .34end “That day” should not come upon us “unawares.” If we are paying attention to world events, we'll be able to see that Jesus' return is imminent.
3. .36b Some will “escape these things... to stand before the Son of man.” We know that all genuine believers will escape the catastrophes of the Great Tribulation. We will be kept from the hour of God's wrath. Our main concern is that we should prepare for these tremendous events by living a godly life.

2 Pe 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

As we observe world events, we can easily see that God is setting the stage for the 2nd Coming of Christ. We see uncontrollable pandemics, terrorism, warfare, economic instability, and the threat of nuclear annihilation, which all leads to men's hearts failing them for fear. So it may not be long before the Lord returns in power and glory. We don't know the day or the hour, but we hope it will be soon.

1. The Second Coming of Christ is a guaranteed future event. It will happen just as Jesus said it would.
2. Believers must be on guard against false prophets and false Christs who make messianic claims. Instead of being drunk or distracted, we should purify ourselves and live blameless, godly lives.
3. Believers should not be upset or alarmed by wars, commotions, or natural disasters. Such events will occur until the End.
4. God is sovereignly controlling history to achieve His own purposes. All things must unfold just as the Bible describes. Everything is moving toward the next events on the prophetic calendar—Jesus' return and the establishment of his kingdom.
5. Our responsibility as disciples is to be ready for Jesus' return and to be zealous in spreading the Gospel until "that day." We should watch and work in the expectation of his imminent return.

The best advice is found in the commands of vs. 34, 36—"**Take heed** to yourselves, . . . **Watch** ye therefore, and **pray** always." We can't control these events, and we may even suffer because of them. But no matter what is happening, we can carefully watch and pray. We can prepare ourselves for Jesus' return by living godly and productive lives.

If you don't know Jesus as your savior, you are not ready for his return. Repent and believe the Gospel.