

ENGAGE

This week we look at Jesus comments about signs of the times of HIS return

- The first section of the lesson has to do with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. I will spend some time on this in the sermon, but please do not make it the emphasis of the lesson. Please focus on the latter two sections about prophecies of HIS return.
- Understanding that no one knows the day or the hour of His return and that we are not to look for signs 'for signs sake', how we to approach the discussion of knowing the 'season' of HIS return and what things we can watch for?
- Near the end of chapter 21, Jesus gives us insights on how we are to live our lives until HIS return.

EXAMINE**(Luke 11-24)**

Luke's third prediction of Jerusalem's fall is by far the most detailed (the others come in 13:34-35; 19:41-44). Because of the speech's importance and complexity, I take a slightly more didactic approach in my overview of it.

The speech's character emerges when one examines the parallels within the Synoptics. Parallels of this Olivet discourse occur in Matthew 24:1-35 and Mark 13:1-37. A comparison of these parallels shows how Luke has drawn out some additional teaching and made some distinct points. Some of these points emerge from the additional material Luke includes (vv. 18, 21-22, 24, 28 are certainly additional material; vv. 19-20, 23b-26, 34-36 are probably additional). Other emphases surface because of the way Luke has presented the traditional material. Where Matthew speaks specifically of the "abomination that causes desolation" (Mt 24:15), for example, Luke simply refers to the "desolation" (Lk 21:20).

The significance of these differences becomes clear as one carefully compares the accounts. Luke emphasizes the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 in a way the other Gospels do not. All the Synoptics anticipate the fall of Jerusalem in the way they introduce the discourse, but Luke focuses on the short-term event in a way Matthew and Mark do not. His temporal indicators (vv. 9, 12) draw the reader back toward the present before really focusing on the end in verses 25-28. A transition begins to appear in verses 20-24, but until verse 19 the focus is still on events before the judgment of the capital in A.D. 70, which is not yet the end.

How can Luke make such a shift? What Luke does is easier to understand when we grasp how divine history was read by the Jews, as well as by the prophets. The belief was that God's judgment followed certain patterns. How he judged in one era resembled how he would judge in another. Because God's character was unchanging and because he controlled history, such patterns could be noted. Thus deliverance in any era was compared to the exodus. One event mirrored another. Exilic judgments, whether Assyrian or Babylonian, were described in similar terms. This "mirror" or "pattern" interpretation of history has been called a typological-

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prophetic reading of the text, with the "type" reflecting a basic pattern in God's activity. This way of reading history sees events as linked and mirroring one another. Sometimes the events are described in such a way that we modern readers would not readily notice that distinct events are being discussed. Sometimes a text offers clarifying reflection after more events detailing God's program have been revealed.

Jesus' eschatological discourse links together two such events, the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the events of the end signaling his return to earth. Because the events are patterned after one another and mirror one another, some of Jesus' language applies to both. Mark and Matthew highlight the mirror's long-term image, while Luke emphasizes the short-term event. Either focus is a correct portrayal of Jesus' teaching. Failure to appreciate the typological background to this speech, however, has led to an overemphasis of one image against the other within the Synoptics. Some readers insist that the portrait of one writer must exactly match that of another. Instead, complementary emphases are possible. Appreciation of typology allows each author to speak for himself and allows the accounts of all the Synoptic writers to be viewed not in contradictory or one-sided terms but as complementary.

The speech makes several points. First, Luke clearly shows how the destruction of A.D. 70 is distinct from but related to the end. The two events should not be confused, but Jerusalem's destruction, when it comes, will guarantee as well as picture the end, since one event mirrors the other. Both are a part of God's plan as events move toward the end.

Second, Jesus' prophetic character is highlighted by this section. God is speaking through Jesus about unfolding events in the plan. Such prophetic gifts were highly respected in the ancient world (Philo: *Life of Moses* 2.9.50-51).

Third, the Jewish nation's fate was clearly tied to its reaction to Jesus. The reader is not to question that the events Jesus describes will result from the nation's failure to respond to him (19:41-44). In fact, if one were to ask why Jerusalem was being judged, Luke has given many reasons. It is filled with hypocrisy (11:37-54), has oppressed the poor (18:7; 20:47), has rejected Messiah (13:33-34; 20:13-18), has missed the day of visitation (19:44), has rejected the gospel (Acts 13:46-48; 18:5-6; 28:25-28) and has slain God's Son (Lk 9:22; 18:31-33; 19:47; 20:14-19; 22:1-2, 52; 23:1-25; Stein 1992:521).

Fourth, the passage offers reassurance to disciples that God will enable them to face persecution and deliver them from it, whether by giving them words to say in their own defense or by saving them after martyrdom.

Fifth, the call is to remain steadfast because God is in control.

So the speech offers information and exhortations. It provides a general outline but not a detailed, dated calendar of future events. Such a general portrait without detailed dates is a common form for biblical apocalyptic material. We must be careful not to get more specific

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than Scripture does about the events of the future. Even though the portrait Jesus gives is general, he is saying, in effect, "Rest assured, God's plan is being fulfilled."

For simplicity's sake I have split the speech into two parts, though it is really one discourse: the events associated primarily with Jerusalem's fall (vv. 5-24) and the return and its significance (vv. 25-38). Toward the Fall of Jerusalem or Before the End (21:5-24)

The structures of earthly empires often are very impressive. They give the sense that they and what they represent will last forever. Visiting the great ruins of civilizations from Babylon to the Aztecs, one imagines the people must have assumed that their glory would endure forever. Humanity tends to suffer from delusions of immortality.

The rebuilt temple of Herod created such an impression. When the disciples praised its grandeur to Jesus (v. 5), the temple was in the midst of an eighty-three-year building program. Started about 20 B.C., it continued until A.D. 63-64, just a few years before Jerusalem's fall in A.D. 70. Assuming an A.D. 33 date for the crucifixion, the program was over fifty years old at the time the disciples marveled at it. The temple clearly made a deep impression on all who visited it. Josephus gives detailed descriptions of its beauty (*Jewish Wars* 1.21.1 401; 5.5.1-6 184-227; *Antiquities* 15.11.1-7 380-425). The Roman historian Tacitus also describes the temple as containing great riches (*History* 5.8.1). Some of its stones were 12 to 60 feet in length, 7.5 feet in height and 9 feet in width (Josephus *Jewish Wars* 5.5.1-2 189-90 gives these measurements in cubits; a cubit is eighteen inches). The temple loomed over the city like a "snow clad mountain" (Josephus: *Jewish Wars* 5.5.6 223). Not only was the building impressive, but it was decorated with gifts from other countries and had elegantly adorned doors and gates of fine craftsmanship (Josephus: *Jewish Wars* 5.5.3-5 206-18).

No wonder the disciples felt national pride as they surveyed the awesome temple, exclaiming at its beautiful stones and . . . gifts dedicated to God. Surely something so magnificent and God-honoring, something that had taken so long to build, would last a very long time. God's presence finally had a secure home.

Jesus' response must have come like a knife in the heart: "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." It is hard for us to appreciate the effect on Jewish ears of what Jesus predicts here. When Jesus speaks of "days coming" or a time coming, he is predicting in prophetic terms the arrival of judgment, just like the one Israel had experienced (Jer 7:1-14; 22:5; 27:6; 52:12-13; on the phrase see Lk 5:35; 17:22; 19:43; 23:29). The magnificent temple, the center of the nation's worship and the sacred locale of God's presence, will be destroyed and turned into a heap of rubble. Centuries of worship and years of reconstruction will be brought to an end. The only way this can occur is if Jerusalem is overrun.

Be assured, Jesus tells the disciples, these things are not permanent. The phrase "these things" (*tauta*) becomes central to the discourse, since the disciples ask in verse 7 when these things will be: "What will be the sign that they are about to take place?" When will the temple's destruction come, along with the city's devastation?

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The broad scope of the question is significant, since a judgment of Jerusalem that wipes out the temple suggests a time of great catastrophe and a turning point in the nation's history (Danker 1988:330). Such an event can only signal that God's plan for the nation is moving along. Though Luke's form of this question is more focused on the temple than the questions in Matthew 24:3 and Mark 13:4, its implications clearly cover the same span.

Two features of this discourse should not be overlooked. First, in verses 8-12 Jesus works from the end backwards and then in verse 25 leaps forward again in time, beyond Jerusalem's destruction to the end. Such a rewinding backwards in time is clear in light of the statement in verse 9 that the end will not come right away and the note in verse 12 that before all this--that is, the events of verses 8-11--other things will occur. With verse 12 and following, Jesus moves forward again, toward the description of Jerusalem's fall and the persecution that will accompany it. The issues of the end and the return of the Son of Man are deferred mostly until verse 25, with the reference to the times of the Gentiles in verse 24 serving as a transition into Jesus' statements about the end times. After Jerusalem falls, the period of Gentile rule will continue until the Son of Man returns.

Second, the events of the end and those of Jerusalem's fall are presented side by side in the entire discourse, as is typical in prophetic presentation, even though we can now look back and know that the events are separated by a large period of time. Such prophetic foreshortening is designed to indicate that one event mirrors and is linked to the other. When the initial event occurs, Jesus' followers can be assured that the rest is coming. But--and this is the key point--for the initial listeners it would be next to impossible to distinguish the times of these mirrored events. More important than these events' time relationship to each other is their linkage in meaning. Both the end and Jerusalem's fall are part of the divine movement toward fulfillment of promise. Anyone originally hearing Jesus' discourse might have assumed the end would come with Jerusalem's fall, but the real indication of the end is not Jerusalem's fall but the return of the Son of Man.

So Jesus warns first about events that are not yet the end. Messianic pretenders will abound, so the disciples must not be deceived. "Do not follow them." Josephus describes such claims in Jewish Wars 6.5.2-3 285-88, 300-309. In addition, social chaos, civil turmoil, wars and other tumultuous events will precede the end. The disciples should not be surprised when the world is in chaos. There is no need for alarm. These things must take place (the must here is the *dei* of divine decree). Paul expresses a parallel concept when he speaks of creation groaning until redemption is complete (Rom 8:18-25). Sin will be with us until Christ returns. Pain and persecution in the world should never surprise us.

Despite the chaos, God's plan is moving on. The end will not come right away. Jesus prepares the disciples for the era to come by reassuring them that worldwide chaos does not mean the cosmos is spinning out of divine control. Such chaos should not cause shock or emotional distress.

Still more chaos will come before the end. Nation will rise against nation, and earthquakes, famines and pestilences will come. All the typology of Jesus' descriptions has roots in judgment

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scenes of the Old Testament (2 Chron 15:6; Is 14:30; 19:2; 29:6; 51:19; Ezek 36:29-30; 38:19; Amos 8:11; Zech 14:5). Fearful events and great signs from heaven are signs of God's activity. (Mark 13:8 mentions the beginning of birth pangs here, but Luke lacks such explicit apocalyptic language.) In sum, chaos of all sorts will precede the end.

But before all these things will come persecution. Disciples will need to stand prepared for its coming. They will be delivered to "synagogues and prisons . . . brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name." The mention of synagogues shows that the period of the early church is in view. In fact, the initial fulfillment of this prediction comes in Acts, starting after the proclamation of Jesus in chapter 3 leads to arrest and persecution in Acts 4. Virtually every chapter after that describes the persecution of the earliest church.

Luke uses a key term to characterize disciples: witnesses for Jesus (v. 13; compare Acts 1:6-8). Between now and the end, they are called to witness to him. Part of that witness is how they face persecution. From Stephen's martyrdom to the suffering of many in the formerly communist Eastern Europe, testimony to Jesus in the face of persecution has had a compelling impact throughout history.

Again Jesus tells his people not to worry. They need not be overly concerned with how they might defend themselves. They don't need a defense attorney, for Jesus himself will be their defense: "I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict" (compare Acts 4:8-12; 7:54; 26:24-32). Though Jesus does not explain here how this works, Luke 12:11-12 and John 14--16 make clear that the gift alluded to here is the Holy Spirit.

The persecution will be painful, because it will involve parents, brothers, relatives and friends. This is why discipleship requires putting God ahead of family (14:26). Some of God's people will even meet death. Put bluntly, "all men will hate you because of me." Part of the chaos before the capital's fall and before the end is the persecution of those allied to Jesus.

But the disciples will receive comfort. "Not a hair of your head will perish." In light of verse 16, this cannot mean that none of them will die. Rather, it must mean that even if they die, they will live (12:4-7). There is no way real harm will come, since Luke uses the emphatic Greek negative here (ou me). In short, by standing firm with Jesus, one gains life--or to use Luke's language, you will gain life. Thus Luke again emphasizes perseverance. Those who cling to the Word with patience bear fruit (8:15). Luke has made it clear that standing firm requires resolve and counting the cost (14:25-33), properly assessing the cares of life (8:14; 14:15-24) and not overvaluing material possessions or the pleasures of life (8:14; 12:19).

In verse 20 Jesus describes Jerusalem's destruction in detail. The sign of its destruction will come when armies surround it. Jesus had already predicted this in 19:41-44. Because of his focus on the near event of Jerusalem's fall, Luke's version of this discourse does not include certain details from the other Synoptics. He does not include Jesus' words about this being a time of unprecedented tribulation. He does not mention the Lord's decision to cut short these

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days so humanity will survive. He lacks any comment about events not coming in winter. Most important, he does not discuss "the abomination that causes desolation"; he mentions only its desolation. The focus throughout is the city's destruction, a destruction that encompasses, but is not limited to, the temple. This will be a time of tension, but it is not yet the end. A phrase unique to Luke shows the distinction. Jerusalem will be trampled on until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The judgment on Jerusalem remains until that time is completed.

When the time of destruction comes, it will be time to flee and hide. Those who are in Judea should head for the mountains, where they can hide in safety, while those in the city should get out. Those in the country should avoid the city. The destruction will be total; the nation will suffer. These events will fulfill all that has been written. The allusion is to prophetic warnings of the price of the nation's covenant unfaithfulness (Deut 28:32; Jer 7:14-26, 30-34; 16:1-9; 17:27; 19:10-15; Mic 3:12; Zeph 1:4-13). The reference to God's pattern of judgment suggests a typological connection here: this judgment is like others before it and like ones that will follow it.

The destruction will be a dreadful time for the most vulnerable people, especially pregnant mothers. Distress and wrath will overwhelm the people and the land (19:44; 23:29). Death and imprisonment will be the fate of many citizens. Jerusalem will be trampled . . . until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Be assured, Jesus warns, the nation will be judged and the temple abandoned. Israel's fall is not the end of God's plan, however, for one more decisive stage remains .The End--the Coming of the Son of Man (21:25-38)

The final stage in God's plan will begin with the Son of Man's return, a theme Luke has emphasized (9:26; 11:30; 12:8, 40; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8). The question of Jesus' return has always been captivating for believers. People have always speculated whether their own time might be the end. Four factors fuel such speculation. First, Jesus taught that his return was imminent; it could come at any moment. Since the time was not specified, such a "next event" hope naturally has led many to wonder if and how it might come soon. Second, Jesus' return is longed for, since his coming represents the saints' redemption. What Christian would not look expectantly for the day when justice and righteousness are established and God's people are vindicated? Clearly Jesus called disciples to have an expectant attitude toward events of the end--not just to assume that "it will all pan out in the end." Third, it is natural to try to fill the gaps in revelation and put pieces of the eschatological puzzle together. People enjoy trying to solve mysteries. Unfortunately, sometimes such speculation strays into date-setting or leads to dogmatism about exact timing and sequence. Our speculations must be tempered by humility about the gaps in our scriptural knowledge, and we need to carefully distinguish what is clear in Scripture from what is only implied. Fourth, Jesus told his disciples to keep awake and be on the watch (v. 36). So we do need to consider the end if we are to be sensitive to Jesus' instruction. Jesus called on disciples to be "end-time minded" without withdrawing from ministry under the assumption that the time is here.

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Jesus does not give a calendar of end-time events as much as a portrait of the moment. Old Testament imagery abounds in his words, since the event will mark the culmination of God's promise to his people. Disciples are to keep watch, in part because the exact time is uncertain (Mk 13:32). The Son of Man is at the door, but no one knows exactly when he will come in. So we should keep watch, while humbly realizing that Jesus did not ask us to determine the exact moment. As this section indicates, we can know the general character of events surrounding the return even if we cannot know the exact timing.

So what will the return look like? Luke 21:25-28 tell us. Its apocalyptic imagery indicates that God is about to work in a major way. Heavenly signs will abound as the cosmos releases its power. Sun, moon and stars will signal the time. In particular, the sea is mentioned, since human beings have often feared its power (Ps 46:2-4; 65:7; 89:9; 107:23-32; Wisdom of Solomon 5:22). Such cosmic signs will indicate a shaking up of the natural order (Is 3:24--4:1; 13:7-13; 24:18-20; 33:9; 34:1-15; Jer 4:23-26; Ezek 32:7-8; Dan 8:10; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Nahum 1:4-5; Hag 2:6, 21; 1 Enoch 80). Such imagery also foreshadows portions of the book of Revelation. To imagine the fear an unleashed, out-of-control creation might generate, think of being caught in a major hurricane, flood or tornado. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. There will be a sense of being trapped and tormented. Faint from terror pictures someone hyperventilating and collapsing because of anxiety. Some argue that Jesus' words about heavenly chaos are figurative for severe destruction. However, a chaotic, destructive situation was already described in verses 8-11, while the chaos of verses 25-27 is of a completely different order. Even creation itself will be in convulsions. Then disciples will know that God is about to act.

Jesus describes the return of the Son of Man in terms that recall Daniel 7:13-14. There the phrase is not used as a title but as a description: "one like a son of man." This one rides the clouds like a god but is a human figure (Ps 104:3; Is 19:1; in the cloud, Ex 34:5; 14:20; Num 10:34). He has human traits superior to the animal traits of the other nations mentioned in Daniel 7. Most important, he shares authority with "the Ancient of Days," a clear reference to God. That authority especially entails the right to judge and make vindication for the saints. Jesus says the Son of Man will return in a cloud with power and great glory. When Jesus does return, it will be to take rulership over all the earth and exercise judgment on behalf of his people (Rev 19:8--20:15). So the saints can lift up [their] heads, because [their] redemption is drawing near. At that moment hope will become confidence (Judg 8:28; Job 10:15; Ps 24:7, 9; 83:2). God's promises to his own are being consummated. As the world shrinks back in fear, the saints will look up in expectation. These things, the immediate signs of his return, will show that God is in control of events--that trust in him has led to vindication.

The discourse changes its focus at this point. Now Jesus applies his teaching. He gives a picture of assurance about what he has predicted (vv. 29-33) followed by an exhortation (vv. 34-36).

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Jesus draws a comparison with a fig tree beginning to bud. When that beloved tree with its sweet fruit begins to show shoots and leaves, it is the sign of summer. Winter's barrenness is left behind. Signs of life are visible. A new season has come.

So it will be at the end. When these cosmic signs are displayed, Jesus' followers can rest assured the end is near. In fact, when the whole discourse is taken into account, Jerusalem's fall--predicted as it is and mirroring the end as it does--also serves as a sign guaranteeing that what Jesus says about the end and redemption will come to pass. So Jesus says to look for two things: the fall of Jerusalem and cosmic signs. With these heavenly portents (vv. 25-26), the kingdom of God is near. In this text Luke speaks of the kingdom as not yet arrived, in contrast to earlier texts where it had already approached or come (10:9, 18; 11:20; 17:20). As has been noted, Luke sees the kingdom in two phases: an initial, already-present phase and a consummating, yet-to-come phase. The consummation will wrap up the promise in total fulfillment. Anticipation will become realization. The kingdom will be present in its fullness.

There is much "sign-watching" today, but this text along with others in the New Testament warns against getting too specific about predictions. The history of the church is littered with those who, though well intentioned and sincere in their belief that they had found the key to the timing of end-time events, were proved wrong. Assembling the puzzle of apocalyptic pieces is a difficult interpretive exercise, since it involves making judgments about many difficult and variously interpreted texts (for a discussion of the hermeneutics involved, see Blaising and Bock 1993:57-105, especially 90-96). We should be cautious about predictions of Jesus' return that are too precise. This discourse and the other New Testament apocalyptic texts indicate a general pattern of events, but since Jesus will return "like a thief in the night," the best we can do is keep watching and be prepared for his return. Jesus has told the church to be ready, so every generation should keep watch. But we should be suspicious of anyone who is certain of the exact timing, for even Jesus said only the Father knows that (Mk 13:31-32). In the meantime the church is called to serve him faithfully, share the gospel and grow in grace.

Jesus assures the disciples that these signs will be so. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." The things Jesus has taught are true, more firm than creation itself.

In the midst of this note of assurance is one of the most-discussed passages in Luke. For Jesus also says, "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." The prediction is made emphatically, using the strong Greek phrase *ou me*. This generation will not (!) pass away.

On the surface it looks as if Jesus is predicting the end within his generation, especially since Luke normally uses the term *generation* (*genea*) to mean the current generation (7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32, 51; 17:25; Acts 2:40; 8:33). Often the term also has a negative implication, meaning this current generation is evil. Against applying this interpretation to 21:32, however, is the reality of the delay. The generation of Jesus' utterance was passing away even as Luke wrote,

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and Luke had described numerous intervening events. Jesus had spoken in the thirties, but Luke was writing, in all likelihood, in the sixties. A reference to the current generation is unlikely.

Neither is it likely that Luke refers to the Jews as this generation. According to this view, the promise is that "the generation of Jews" will not pass away. Though this approach removes any problem for the meaning, it is unlikely because *genea* is not used in this general, nontemporal, ethnic sense elsewhere.

Two other options are possible. If the term has no temporal force, then it could mean "the evil generation of humankind." Using the term with this descriptive, ethical force would mean Jesus is speaking of a quality of human being: evil persons will not escape the judgment when it comes. This evil generation will not pass away before God deals with them. There will be judgment and vindication.

Finally, the term might refer to the generation of the end. In other words, once the beginning of the end arrives with the cosmic signs of verses 25-26, the Son of Man will return before that generation passes away. Such a meaning honors the term's temporal force and reads it as somewhat contextually limited by Luke's clear distinction between near and far events. This view has been rejected by some as too obvious a sense--the last generation will not pass away (Stein 1992:526). However, this misreads the view's force. It is arguing that the end will occur within one generation; the same group that sees the start of the end will see its end. This is the option I slightly prefer, though the previous sense is also possible.

However the phrase this generation is taken, Jesus' statements in verses 32-33 emphasize that Jerusalem's destruction and then the events of the end, including the Son of Man's return and the cosmic signs that accompany it, are more certain than creation's permanence. Be assured, Jesus says, these things will come to pass.

So Jesus calls for faithful living in the interim. "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life." Harking back to the imagery of 8:12-15 and 12:42-48, Jesus warns that excessive concern for or indulgence in this life's affairs can leach away one's faithfulness. Such distractions "weigh down one's heart" (*mepote barethosin hymon hai kardiai*). The emotional load can grow into a snare that traps us in that day when our stewardship before God is revealed. However, to the one who is watching, the day will not come as a sudden, embarrassing surprise because of unpreparedness. Still, the day will impact all. No one will escape standing before the Son of Man. We are all subject to him.

So Jesus says, "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." Here is why Jesus has revealed the plan--to call disciples to be on the alert. Heeding, watching and praying lead to endurance. Heeding really means following in obedience. Watching means that our eyes are expectant and looking for the Lord's return, focused on the fact that he will bring us to himself. Praying means we are dependent, looking to him to give us the strength to walk in faithfulness. No matter how tough things get, we can know as we look to God that he cares for us.

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Luke notes that Jesus continues to teach at the temple and to lodge at the Mount of Olives. He is still popular with the people, who rise early to hear him in the temple. But that popularity will not last long. The black cloud of rejection and the cross approaches.

(Luke 21:25-28) When the final period of calamity hits the world, look up-your redemption is on the way.

"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; 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. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

a. Signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity: This kind of total chaos and calamity is described in horrific detail in Revelation 6, 8-9, and 15-18. All this will culminate in the dramatic, spectacular return of Jesus, coming with His church to this earth.

b. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near: The things that will begin to happen are described in Luke 21:25-27. Jesus assures believers who are on the earth at that time to be ready, because the time of great tribulation they are experiencing will not last forever, but Jesus will return in glory soon.

(Luke 21:29-33) When you see these signs (spoken of in Luke 21:25-26), you know that the end is very near.

Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

a. Look at the fig tree: The fig tree is just one example of a tree that buds before summer; no special reference to Israel seems to be intended (and all the trees). 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.

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i. The generation that sees those signs will also see the very end. God will not prolong the Great Tribulation forever.

b. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away: No mere man could truthfully say this. Jesus claims that His words are the very words of God-and they are.

(Luke 21:34-38) How to live in the last days.

"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. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 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." And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.

a. We must take heed because there are certain things that will make one unprepared- carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life. Each of these things can make us unprepared for the day of Jesus' return.

i. Carousing literally refers to the hangover that comes after a time of intoxication.

b. Watch therefore: We must watch. Anyone who watches will never be caught in a snare-our failure to watch keeps us from being ready.

c. We must pray always, that we may be found worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass. The good news in Jesus is that we don't have to go through this calamity that is coming. He will take as many as are ready before this calamity begins.

i. Regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, those who listened to and obeyed Jesus escaped the horrible destruction that came upon the city.

ii. Regarding the far greater destruction that is coming upon the whole earth, those who listen to and obey Jesus can escape the horrible destruction that will come.

QUESTIONS

1. What is Jesus' reference to the fig tree supposed to teach his disciples? (21:29-30)
2. In verse 31, what does the term "these things" refer back to in the context.
3. We assume that "this generation" doesn't mean refer to merely the people who were contemporaries of Jesus; then what DOES "this generation" mean in the context? (12:32)

Sources

blueletterbible.org

[bible gateway.com](http://bible.gateway.com)

jesuswalk.com

4. Why does Jesus warn us of spiritually-dulling lifestyles? (21:34)
5. How can "the anxieties of life" be just as dulling as drunkenness?
6. What are Jesus' direct commands to his disciples in light of his teaching on the end-times? (21:36)
7. What will these commands do for us?
8. What will they do for Jesus' cause?
9. What does it mean, to "stand before the Son of Man"? What does that refer to?
10. What is the balance between resting in the assurance of the grace of God, on the one hand, and striving to escape the temptations all around us, on the other?

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