

**God's Plan Demands Christ's Return, Part 2**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 42-255

Would you open your Bible, please, to Luke 21...Luke 21. We are in a series called, "Signs of Christ's Return...Signs of Christ's Return." We're looking at the twenty-first chapter of Luke in which our Lord Himself gives a message on His return to His disciples. You will remember that it is on Wednesday of Passion Week, just two days before His crucifixion, that He sits on the western slope of the Mount of Olives with His disciples and tells them about His Second Coming. It's a critical message because everything is about to look like it ends very badly...very, very badly.

From a worldly perspective, the life of Jesus looks like a total disaster. He is executed like a common criminal on that Friday in front of the watching world in Israel. He dies in the most ignominious way possible, nailed, to hang naked in the sun. It can't go more wrong than that.

But that is not the end of the story by any means...by any means. On the third day after His crucifixion, He will rise from the dead. He will then ascend into heaven forty days later and in the future He will come again. What the world saw on that hillside on a Friday outside Jerusalem is not by any means the last vision of Jesus Christ. And so, on the brink of the darkest hour in the life of His followers, He gives to them the brightest hope. The core of this sermon which is recorded by Mark in Mark 13, recorded by Luke in Luke 21, and in full extent recorded by Matthew in Matthew 24 and 25. The heart of it is found in verses 25 to 28. Let's jump ahead, we'll get to this text in detail in a few weeks, but let's read it so we understand that this is the highpoint, this is the theme of what He is saying. And there will be in the future signs in sun and moon and stars and upon the earth dismay among nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near. The Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. He goes quietly like a criminal, shamed, scorned, despised, rejected, crucified. He comes back in blazing supernatural glory. The disciples need to know that. We need to know that. And so on that Wednesday night, Jesus sits them down and tells them that He will return.

The end of the story has not been written. It will be written when He comes. And thus He introduces to us again the subject of His Second Coming, as He does to those disciples as well.

It is one of the sad realities of our day, that this teaching on the Second Coming is so needlessly convoluted, confounded, confused and made complex. Whenever you bring up the issue of the Second Coming with people, even leaders and theologians, it becomes much debated, because there's so many different views. People's understanding of the Second Coming is often seen through the filter of a particular theology, a particular historic point of view, a particular interpretive scheme which makes the subject more complicated and more obscure than it needs to be.

On the twelve-hour flight from Munich, last night, back to Los Angeles, I was reading through a commentary on this section of Scripture and what I read was the most impossible, silly, bizarre, obscure interpretation. And I thought to myself, if that is the true interpretation of what Jesus said to the disciples, He might as well have said nothing because they never would have figured that out.

Let's go back to basics. I mean, let's be reasonable. Let's go back as we always want to go back in interpreting anything in the Bible to what did He say to the people at the time and what was He trying to communicate? Whatever it was that He said, it was intended for them that they would understand it. Kind of basic. In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew and the eleventh verse, Jesus said this. He said, "It is given to you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. God has hidden these things from the wise and the prudent but He's revealed it unto babes." We just have to understand that He is not talking to sophisticated theologians. He's not talking to people who have earned terminal degrees in theology, systematic theology, or who even are scribes and Old Testament law experts, rabbis. There's not a rabbi among His disciples as far as we know. Certainly not any scholars, they were just an assortment of working people, fishermen and tax collectors and people who worked with their hands and common folks. Jesus is not trying to make things complicated for them, He's trying to make things clear to them.

So the simple message you always ask yourself, the simple point you begin with in studying the Scriptures, "What was Jesus trying to say to the people to whom He was saying it? And how would they understand it?" Because how they would understand it is how we are to understand it. It just continues to grieve me that the simplicity of what Jesus says about His Second Coming gets obscured in the most confused systems. Jesus answers their questions, simple questions, with simple answers and clear answers so that everyone can understand.

Let's look back at verse 5, Luke 21. Pick up the text where we left it a few weeks ago. Well some were talking about the temple that was ordained with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said. Let's create the scene again, remember? He finished the day of teaching, conflict with the leaders. He walks out of the temple area. His disciples follow Him. It's twilight, the day is over. He's exhausted from all day long conflict and instruction to the crowds. He sits down on the familiar western slope of the Mount of Olives, looking across the Kidron Valley to the great temple on the east wall of the city of Jerusalem. It's a staggering thing to see it. Some thought it was the greatest building in the ancient

world. It had already been under construction fifty-plus years by that time and it would be thirty-six years more of construction until 63 A.D. just seven years before it was totally destroyed. In full, it was into the fifty years of an 86-year construction project. It was made out of white marble, overlaid with gold. Josephus, the soldier who became a historian, describes it in words that talk of it as shining like the sun, with brilliance...magnificent. And they were stunned again as they looked at it and saw the beautiful stones and the votive gifts, gifts that were given to the temple, beautiful gifts given in connection with a vow.

They're looking at it and they realize that while it was elevated and built to be an honor to God, it isn't anymore because Jesus cleansed it on Tuesday, the day before, and said, "It's supposed to be the house of God but you've turned it into a den of thieves." And they're seeing it in all its splendor and it's a symbol of false religion. And while the conversation about its magnificence is going on, Jesus makes a jaw-dropping statement, verse 6, "As for these things that you're looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down."

Wow, destroyed. It's no longer the house of God and it's coming down. This is not the first time Jesus had pronounced judgment on Judaism, or on Israel, or on Jerusalem. Back in chapter 13 verse 34, He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her, how often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not have it. Behold, your house is left to you desolate." And if He has in mind the temple, it's no longer His house, it's your house. God is not there anymore. It's going to be desolate. "And you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Here He says judgment is coming, desolation is coming, I'm leaving and I won't be back until you recognize who I am. Israel, Jerusalem, the temple to this day is still under the desolation of that curse...still. They have not acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, there is no temple, and there is no peace in Jerusalem.

In the nineteenth chapter of the gospel of Luke, Jesus says in verse 41, He enters the city, He sees it. This is on Monday of the same week, two days before. He comes in on Monday, cleanses it on Tuesday, teaches on Wednesday and leaves on Wednesday evening. Has a Passover on Thursday and is crucified on Friday.

When He approached in His triumphal entry, He saw the city and He wept over it saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace, but now they have been hidden from your eyes," and they're still hidden from their eyes and they will be until they recognize their Messiah.

Then He says this, verse 43, "The days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, siege and surround you, hem you in on every side and will level you to the ground and your children within you and they will not leave in you one stone upon another because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation. And then to punctuate the pronouncement of destruction, He

walked right into the temple in verse 45 and began to cast out those who were selling and said, "It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer, you have made it a robber's den. It's no longer My house, it's no longer God's house, it's your house and it's desolate."

So here Jesus says again, back to chapter 21, what He has already said, "Judgment is coming...judgment is coming." They're forced now, these disciples, to recognize it. They know that that's part of the end of the age. They know the age ends with judgment on the Gentiles and a purging of Israel because that's what the prophet said. So it fits into their eschatology that this is the end. Okay, the temple is going to be destroyed as a part of that, it would be a shocking thing to think about it since it had been fifty years in the building and it was so beautiful and it was supposed to represent the true God. It would be hard for them to comprehend it. But they understand now, Jesus has said it several times, the whole thing is coming down. That must mean in their minds that if judgment is coming now, so is the Kingdom coming cause the Old Testament promises that without separating the two...without separating the two.

And so, their natural response comes in verse 7, when Jesus says this is going to be destroyed, they say, "Teacher, when, therefore, will these things be and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" We want it to happen, we're ready, what do we look for? Because when that happens, we know that's the end of this age and then You will establish the glory of the Messianic Kingdom. And that's also behind the questions they asked which Matthew records in Matthew 24:3. They also asked at the same time, "What will be the sign of Your presence? Your parousia, your dominating presence and the end of the age?"

They could sense that it all was going to happen. He was there. They didn't see Him leaving even though He said He was going to leave. They didn't see the day of judgment and establishment of the Kingdom as something thousands of years into the future. They saw it all as happening at the coming of Messiah. They thought they were on the threshold of the Kingdom.

Back in chapter 19, you remember, in verse 11, because Jesus was near Jerusalem and they supposed that the Kingdom of God was going to appear immediately, that's what they believed. So He told them the story about a man who went away for a long, long time. Another hint that there would be a separation between His coming to die and proclaim and purchase salvation and His coming to judge and to reign.

The first hint came in Luke 4. Go back to Luke 4. The first hint that His first and second comings were different, the first hint that He would come once for salvation and a second time to establish His Kingdom, the first hint came in Luke 4 early in His ministry when He was in His home town of Nazareth in the synagogue. While He was in Nazareth in the synagogue, the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him, verse 17. The beginning of His Galilean ministry, a couple of years earlier. He opened the book, found the place where it was written and He reads Isaiah 61:1 and 2 which is in

verses 18 and 19. I'm sorry, it's all in verse 18...verse 19 is from Leviticus 25:10 which is added. But in verse 18, this is what He reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, set free those who are downtrodden." He quotes Isaiah 61:1 and 2. However, He leaves off the last line. The last line of Isaiah 61:2 is, "And the day of the vengeance of our God."

See, in Isaiah's words, coming to preach the gospel and coming to bring the vengeance of God, is all in one text. Jesus omits the part about vengeance because He didn't come the first time to do that. Vengeance and wrath is for the next time. So He says, having read up to that point and stopping in verse 21, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. I have come to proclaim the gospel, to purchase salvation through the sacrifice of Myself." And He leaves off the part about vengeance, that's yet far off.

And so, He has given them clues. He has even said He is like a nobleman who goes away for a long time. He has told them He's going to die, He's going to be rejected, He's going to be killed. They still can't quite put it all together. Even after He rises from the dead in Acts chapter 1, after they have been with Him and He's been teaching them about the Kingdom in verse 6, they say to Him, "Will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" They still can't see it as two events with time between. It's so important for us to understand that's exactly what He is saying.

He starts with, "This temple is going to be torn down," that happened in forty years, 70 A.D. General Titus, the great Roman general whose father was the Caesar, Caesar Vespasian, came and did exactly what Jesus said he would do. They destroyed the temple, they burned it, actually. Some false prophet, Josephus says, had told people that if they go there they would be safe from the Romans. Six thousand people huddled for safety in the temple and were consumed by the fire. But Jesus said, however, about the destruction of that temple was only a small preview of a far-greater destruction to come in the future. Another time in the future yet when verse 20, when Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies...that yet in the future. What was going to happen in 40 years would only be a preview of the great final surrounding of Jerusalem at the end of the age when Jesus comes in His glory and judgment.

So Jesus is talking in verse 6 about the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., but that launches Him into bigger discussion because the question is...when will You come and establish Your presence and when will be the end of the age? To which He says in verse 8, "See to it that you're not misled." Don't be confused, and yet so many people are. "Many will come in My name saying, 'I'm He, the time is at hand,' don't go after them." And it happened that way. Many false teachers came after Jesus had gone and claimed to be the Messiah and that the Kingdom was going to begin. Remember a few weeks ago I told you they were executing one a day, according to Josephus...false claimants as insurrectionists. Jesus said, "No, it's going to be a long time," verse 9, "you're going to hear about wars, disturbances. Don't be terrified, these things must take place first, but the end doesn't follow

immediately.”

How extensive is it going to be? “Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, great earthquakes, plagues, famines, terrors, great signs from heaven, persecution, all this is going to go on. There is going to be war among nations, war between kingdoms, lots of time passing.” What He’s describing here is history. Don’t be mistaken, long way off. But I will come.

As you break down His message starting in verse 8, He talks about the preliminaries to His coming, the things that are going to happen before He comes. Then starting in verse 25 He talks about His actual coming. Then in verse 29, talks about preparation. So it’s preliminaries, then the promise of His coming, and then the preparation. That’s the way we’ll break it down and next time we’ll start working through the preliminaries.

Jesus is coming, that’s how history ends. How history ends does matter. The reason for history is the end. The reason for the beginning is the end. The reason for all the stuff in the middle is the end. And how can you work to get the beginning right, get the middle right, and not be interested in the end? What Jesus said here is so easy to understand, it’s so clear, it’s so simple, it’s actually unmistakable...unmistakable.

So, as we work through this, we’re going to see the details that will be preliminary to His coming. We’re going to describe the actual coming. And then we’re going to hear how to be prepared in every generation for He could and begin these events with the Rapture of the church at any moment.

Now before we look at the text next week, I want to go back to what I was telling you last time. We cannot make a minor issue out of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is the reason for everything, the glory of the Son and the gathering in of His redeemed people and the judgment of sin and sinners. That’s the culmination of everything. And so I suggested to you last time, and I’ll complete it today, that there are three categories of reasons why Jesus has to come.

Number one, divine persons demand His coming...divine persons, the promise of God, the statements of Jesus and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit. It is trinitarian testimony. Jesus must come because every member of the Trinity has so declared. Divine persons demand His coming.

Secondly, divine programs demand His coming. His program for the church, His program for the nations, and His program for Israel.

And finally, this morning, just briefly, divine priorities...divine priorities demand His coming...divine priorities.

First of all, the humiliation of Christ demands it...the humiliation of Christ demands it. God loves the Son, He loves the Son perfectly. He loves the Son because He's well pleased with the Son. He honors the Son. He gives glory to the Son. He tells us to listen to His Son, to honor His Son, to love His Son. And the Son of God hanging on a cross naked, covered by blood, spit, sweat and flies is not the last vision this world will see...not the last by any means.

As I went in to many Catholic Churches in Italy in the last couple of weeks, every time I saw Jesus, if He was a baby, He was in Mary's arms. If He wasn't a baby, He was a corpse in her lap or a corpse on a cross. That's not my vision of Christ. I rejoice in the cross but I look for the coming King. That's not the final vision of Christ. It is inconceivable that that would be the world's last vision of Him.

You say, "Well wait a minute, didn't some people see Him after His resurrection? Only believers. First Corinthians 15, it tells explicitly that He appeared only to believers. Verse 4, "He was buried, He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," Paul writes. He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. He appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, most of whom who remain until now, but some have fallen asleep, or died. He appeared to James, then to all the Apostles. And then last of all, He appeared to me also, as one untimely born, says the Apostle Paul, and that was the vision on the road to Damascus. He appeared to believers. The world has never seen Christ since they saw Him hanging on a cross. And Hebrews, a wonderful verse, chapter 9 and verse 28, separates the two comings of Christ, says this, "Christ also having been offered once to bear the sins of many shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin for those who eagerly wait for Him." He appeared once with reference to sin, hanging on a cross as a sacrifice. He will appear once more without reference to sin, coming in triumphant salvation glory. The glory of Christ is at the heart of this sermon, and I read it to you in verses 25 to 28, He will come in power and great glory in the clouds of heaven.

I love the words of Matthew which record what Jesus said on this same occasion. Matthew chapter 24 verse 29, "Immediately after the Tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

Only a few people on a hillside in Jerusalem on a Friday afternoon saw Him die. The world will see Him next time. "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the sky to the other." He's coming in glory.

God's priority is to honor His all-glorious Son. In chapter 6 of Revelation we have a picture of the coming of Christ that parallels what I just read you out of Matthew 24, direct parallel in description. In Revelation 6, we're now looking to the future, the time of the Great Tribulation, "I looked...verse 12...He broke the sixth seal, there was great earthquake, the sun became black as sackcloth made of

hair, the whole moon became like blood.” Remember even in Mark it says the sun and the moon are extinguished. “The stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Exactly what Jesus said to the disciples. There’s going to be disturbances in the sky, disturbances in the earth. “Furthermore, the kings of the earth, the great men, the commanders, the rich, the strong and every slave and every free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.” That’s exactly what I read you in Mark, in Luke, in Matthew, the same thing. People are frightened. Their hearts faint for fear.

“They say to the mountains,” in verse 16, “the rocks fall and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb for the great day of the wrath has come and who is able to survive?”

The whole world is going to see Him the next time. Only a few saw Him on the cross. But His image on a cross has been represented across the world. The world knows Him as a crucified Savior. The world will one day see Him as a King, as a sovereign Judge and as a destroyer of the wicked.

God will not allow that His Son not be glorified before the whole world. That’s a priority. God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, and that at that name, every knee will bow. Some will bow in submission in faith, some will bow in terror and fear.

Another priority, the humiliation of Christ demands the return of Jesus Christ, so does the destruction of Satan. Christ must come back to destroy the devil. As you well know, he is called the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of this world, the god of this age. He moves about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He has been given by God the freedom to move through this world to be the god of this world, to be the ruler of this world. Jesus said, “Anybody who is not in God’s Kingdom is in the kingdom of Satan. He who was the anointed cherub,” according to Ezekiel 28, “led a rebellion against God, a third of the angels went with him. They became the demons. They have been against God and all His purposes ever since the Fall. Satan still has freedom within the purposes of God.”

Satan is so powerful in the world that he took Jesus up on a hill, according to Matthew 4 and Luke 4, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said, “I can give them to You because they’re mine.” He runs the world. The whole world, 1 John 5:19, lies the lap of the evil one. Sometimes you hear people say, and I heard it again this week again, “You know, a certain town up there in northern Italy, they have Satan worship.

Really. Every place that doesn’t worship the true God in the true way through the true Christ and the true gospel is a form of Satan worship. All of it...all of it. There was Satan worship going on in every town, everywhere. For a while he has the run of the world. But he is a usurper and there will be an



ending to his reign.

Look at Revelation 5...Revelation 5. This is a scene in heaven just before Christ comes...just before He comes. John has a vision, a magnificent one, familiar to us, in John 5. "And he sees in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne," that's God. "A scroll written inside and on the back." Normally you don't write on the both sides of a scroll, but God has a lot to say. So the scroll is written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. They used to seal wills seven times, roll it and seal it, roll it and seal it, roll it and seal it, so it could not be broken by an unauthorized person. This is the title deed to the earth. This is the right to reign and rule. And the Father has the title deed in His hand. John says, "I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' No one in heaven, no one on earth, no one under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it, no one. And I began to weep greatly. No one was found worthy to open the scroll and look into it. Who could take back the world from Satan? One of the elders, one of the redeemed in heaven said to me, 'Stop weeping, behold the lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals. Who is the lion from the tribe of Judah and the Root of David, the root and offspring of David? None other than Messiah.' And I saw between the throne...verse 6...with the four living creatures, four angelic beings and the elders, redeemed, a lamb." Now you've got a lion who is also a lamb, standing as if slain and now alive, having seven horns speaking of His full authority, seven eyes, full omniscience, and also the power of the sevenfold Holy Spirit. And He came and took out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne the scroll." He had a right.

"When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints and they sang a new song saying, 'Worthy are Thou to take the book and to break its seals for Thou wast slain and did purchase for God with thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation and Thou hast made them to be a Kingdom and a priest who are God and they will reign upon the earth.' And they sing that glorious, 'Worthy is the Lamb.' He will take the scroll. He will take the title deed. He will conquer Satan. And I looked and heard the voice of many angels, all of heaven breaks into a cacophony of praise. Everybody around the throne, the living creatures, the elders, the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands. And they were all saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing and every created thing in the heavens and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea and all things in them were joining in to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion, forever and ever,'" and that's a total takeover.

"And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen, amen, amen, let it be, let it be, let it be.' And the elders fell down and worshiped." Starting in verse 6, the Lamb begins to break the seals. And then Revelation records how Christ will take over the world. And in chapter 20, He will bind Satan and all his angels and eventually cast them eternally into the Lake of Fire.

History in this world will not end with Satan on the throne, folks. The Son of God will be vindicated. The Son of God will be vindicated. He will come back to reign and to rule over this world. He is entitled to it.

And so, the humiliation of Jesus Christ requires it. The destruction of Satan requires it. And finally, the expectation of the saints requires that Christ come. This is our hope. We're looking for, Titus 2:13, the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Is this a false hope? Where did we get this hope? Did we invent this hope? No, did not the angel say when Jesus went into heaven, "This same Jesus who has gone up from you shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven?" Didn't they say that in Acts 1:9 to 11. You're watching Him go in the clouds, He's going to come in the clouds in the same way as you've seen Him go.

We have this hope because Scripture gives us this hope. First Thessalonians 1:10 describes this, "As a church we wait for His Son from heaven...we wait for His Son from heaven," 1 Thessalonians 1:10. In 2 Thessalonians 1 it says that He is coming to repay the ungodly, verse 7, with fire, flaming fire, dealing out retribution, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, to those who do not know God, those who do not obey the gospel. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord in the glory of His power and also coming to be glorified in His saints on that day and to be marveled at among all who have believed." He hasn't yet come in full blazing glory to cause us to marvel. This is our hope because this is God's promise.

We should be like those under the altar in Revelation 6 who are saying, "How long, O Lord, how long, how long until You finally come and receive Your glory?" John says He's coming, he says it again and again in the visions of Revelation. And finally at the end he says, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus...even so, come, Lord Jesus. This is our hope." And we have this hope because God has given us this hope and we do not follow cleverly devised fables when we make known to You the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This isn't some pipe dream, this is the promise of God in His Word.

You say, "Well you always say He could come at any moment." The first event is a sign-less event, that's the Rapture of the church, when the church is taken out. Then comes the Tribulation, seven-year period, then comes the return of Jesus Christ in judgment to set up His Kingdom, at the end of a thousand-year Kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth. It's all triggered by a sign-less event. Every...every true believer since the very beginning in the apostolic era has lived as if Jesus could launch that in the next moment. When Paul says that there's a Rapture coming, he says, "And we who are alive and remain," he speaks of himself as if it could happen in his lifetime. We believe in imminency, that means it's the next event and it's a sign-less event, it's a moment, the twinkling of an eye and we're gone. And then the judgment begins to break out. We are kept from that hour of Tribulation.

You say, "How can you believe that after two thousand years that it could happen at any moment?" Because, Peter reminds us, 2 Peter 3, that with the Lord a thousand years is as a day. To the eternal God, what is a thousand years? You say, "Well what's He waiting for?" He's waiting because He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. He is gathering in His redeemed people and it doesn't begin until He has gathered His redeemed church. Believe me, He's coming. It could happen at any moment.

So what should be our response? Not a fictional response to this, not an indifferent response to this. But I close with this, look at the thirteenth chapter of Romans...thirteenth chapter of Romans. Here is a good practical call by the Apostle Paul to us in expectation of Christ's return. Verse 11, Romans 13:11, "And this do knowing the time," not chronos time, not clock time, but knowing the kairos, the epic, knowing the age, knowing in which time you live. You live in the time just prior to the imminent coming of Christ for His church. Understand the era you're living in. "Knowing this that it is already the hour for you to wake from sleep." That's His first command. Wake up, get a grip on the time. "For now salvation deliverance is nearer than when we believed." Every day we get nearer to this great event. Every day we get nearer to the time when we face the Lord. Wake up, understand the era in which you live. Approach your life urgently.

"The night is almost gone," verse 12 says. "The day is on the brink." Here's a second command, "Let us therefore lay aside, throw off," used to throw off your dirty clothes. "Get rid of the deeds of darkness." Verse 13, "Get rid of carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, jealousy, get rid of...verse 14...anything that makes provision for the flesh in regard to its lust. Get rid of it."

The third command, the end of verse 12, "Put on the armor light." Verse 14, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put off sin, put on righteousness. Wake up, cast off, put on. Be ready, He could come at any moment."

If you knew Jesus was going and coming in the next 24 hours, 24 hours from now, He's going to Rapture us and we'd see Him face to face, would that change your 24 hours? Dramatically, wouldn't it? He may, He may come in 24 minutes. Does that have any effect on you? Wake up. You're living in the imminent return of Jesus to gather His church, are you ready to face Him without shame to appear, as John puts it, with confidence before Him? Could you say, "Lord, I hope You come in the next 24 minutes, I hope You come in the next two minutes. I want to stand face to face with You. I'm ready." Get rid of sin and put on righteousness so that you can say, "Even so, come Lord Jesus, come now, come quickly. I'm ready to see You face to face, to look into Your face and have nothing for which to be ashamed."

Father, we come to You now, recognizing our own worthiness and in our own strength we could never be ready, but by Your Spirit, by His power and His work in us we can live lives that cause us to love Your appearing. Paul said it, that You're ready to reward Him and all those who love Your appearing. We say, "Lord Jesus, come, come now, take us to heaven, we're ready to receive our eternal reward and to look into Your face and express our perfect worship." We thank You that the end of the story is not the way it appears to most. The end awaits us, nearer than ever. We pray, Lord, that all are ready. And we can be ready only by faith in Christ.

And now, Father, again as we close, we ask that You will do Your work in our hearts. Help us to respond to the injunction to wake up, cast off and put on so that we can truly be eager for Your coming. We just can't wait for the day when You gather Your church. May it be soon. And for the day when You judge and establish Your own glory in Your world, and break the power of sin and are exalted, this is our desire. We thank You that in the exaltation of the Son, O God, You have provided also the exaltation of unworthy sinners like us. Thank You for the promise and we live in that expectation, not because we're worthy, but because You love us and have drawn us into this promise by grace. Receive our thanks in Your Son's name. Amen.

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