Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Final Generation of the Future Judgment
Scripture: Luke 21:29-33
Code: 42-264

It is now our time to turn to the Word of God, Luke chapter 21. Luke chapter 21 and our text for today is verse 29 and following down through verse 33...Luke chapter 21 and verses 29 to 33 and this is the Word of the Lord. Let me read these verses to you.

“And He told them a parable. Behold the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. Even so, you too when you see these things happening, recognize that the Kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

If you’ve been with us, you realize that the twenty-first chapter of Luke is a chapter about the return of Jesus Christ, not His first coming which we are celebrating at this time of year, but His Second Coming. And, in fact, the hope of every Christian is the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians are those who love His appearing. We are those who are looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We as Christians are awaiting eagerly for the glory which shall be revealed in us, that glorious manifestation of the sons of God to take place at Christ’s return. We are waiting for the redemption of our body. The New Testament says we are those who are waiting for the Son from heaven. We are waiting for the coming of Christ, waiting for that time when we reign with Him, when saints judge the world, waiting for that day when we shall all be changed, waiting for that day when sin is ended and we are presented to Christ as a chaste virgin to our bridegroom, waiting for that day when we are present with the Lord, when we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

All of that, of course, is scattered throughout the New Testament because one of the dominant themes of the New Testament is the believer’s hope in the return of Jesus Christ. It is not just one subject among many, but really is the most important of all subjects because all other truths direct us toward the consummation of everything in the return of Christ. Redemption finds its culmination in the return of Jesus Christ. It is the end of all history. It is the culmination of God’s glorious purpose. The truth of the Second Coming of Christ, the truth of Christ’s return then fills the New Testament. It is scattered throughout Scripture, most significantly in the New Testament, the theme of the Second Coming is introduced by Jesus Christ Himself. And most comprehensively and most completely, on the Mount of Olives, on Wednesday of Passion Week in answer to a question or series of questions posed to Him by the disciples. That is why this chapter, along with its parallel in Mark 13 and in

Matthew 24 and 25 is called the Olivet Discourse. It is the teaching on the Second Coming given by Jesus on the Mount of Olives in answer to questions from His disciples regarding His coming and the end of the age and the establishment of His Kingdom. It is a great answer, it is a sweeping answer to those questions, it is a comprehensive chapter. What we've done is gone through Luke 21, compared it with Mark 13 and expanded it in Matthew chapter 24 and 25. It is Christ's own teaching on His return.

Now let me just quickly set the scene for you. It all started in verse 7 with questions posed by the disciples. They were primarily articulated, the other writers tell us, by Peter, James, John and Andrew. So there were multiple questions. Here Luke tells us He was asked, "Teacher, when therefore will these things be? What will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

Matthew says they also asked, "What will be the sign of Your coming and what will be the sign of the end of the age?" They were questions about the end of history and the establishment of the Kingdom of Messiah which He had promised and which the Old Testament prophets had promised as well.

So Jesus is answering the questions about His return, about His coming to judge, about His coming in glory to set up His Kingdom. His answer is very, very complete. It is not mysterious. It is not complex. It is not confounding. It is, frankly, straightforward and clear.

First He says, "Between My first coming and Second Coming, during that whole period which has now gone on for two thousand years, there are some general signs that you can expect. Those are indicated in verses 8 through 19 and we went through them in detail. Primarily they can be catalogued into three separate sections. One deception, the flourishing of a false kind of Christianity...false Christians, false teachers and a false church. We know that to be the case.

Secondly, disasters. There will be global disasters brought on by war, by natural disasters that will occur at every level and in every manner.

Thirdly, persecution...persecution of those who are true followers of Jesus Christ.

These three things in an escalating fashion, an increasingly worse fashion will characterize this period between the two comings. Those are the general signs which should be obvious to all of us. This is indeed the way history has unfolded, the words of our Lord are perfectly accurate.

Then He says, "When you get near the end of this period, near My return, look for a specific sign." Verse 20, "Jerusalem surrounded by armies and the desolation of Jerusalem at hand." Matthew and Mark also record this and they record the fact that it is connected to the prophecy of Daniel in an event called the abomination of desolation. Look for that. That is an event that occurs in the mid-point of a final seven-year period. It sets off a triggering of judgments that become worse and worse and

worse. So the general signs, verses 8 to 19, a specific sign in the future will come in a generation yet to come in which they will see desolation in the land of Jerusalem imminent because the armies of the world will be surrounding that city with a threatening force. They will then desecrate the holy place. The Antichrist will set up an image of himself there in the holy place of a rebuilt temple and call the whole world to worship no one but him. That blasphemy and that sacrilege will trigger the final three and a half years of divine judgment on the earth. So that specific sign is featured in verses 20 to 24. It ends up, of course, with death and destruction for Jerusalem.

And then after that, you come to verses 25 and 26. Near the end of that three and a half years, the end of that terrible time of judgment triggered by Jerusalem being surrounded, near the end there will be what I guess we could call universe altering signs....universe altering signs. There will be signs in sun, moon, stars that produce dismay and perplexity. The sea will be affected. The waves of the sea affected. Verse 26, the powers of the heavens will be shaken, causing people to die from fear and the expectation of what all of this leads to.

So you have general signs through this sweeping two thousand years up to now. You have near the very end, just before the Lord comes, three and a half years before, this single sign of the desolation of Jerusalem. Near the end of that period of time, you have the devastating universe altering signs that are described in verses 25 and 26. Then you have verse 27, then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

So they ask the question, “What will be the sign of Your coming? What will be the sign of the end of the age? When are these things going to happen? What are we supposed to be looking for?” And he gives them the broad, sweeping assessment of what we’re to look for and we’re living and watching all of those things in the general sign category. A future generation will see a specific sign, the desolation of Jerusalem. That will launch a time of unbelievable and unequaled judgment described in the book of Revelation, chapter 6 to the end, particularly the latter seals and trumpet and bowl judgments. And that will then lead right up to the return of Jesus Christ. And the return of Christ, of course, is the final sign. When you look up and see Him in the universe that has gone black because God has turned out all the sources of light and out of the blackness comes the Son of Man in blazing full glory and power, returning to earth to judge all sinners and to bring all saints into the glory of the Kingdom He will establish when He gets here. So all of these things have now been laid out.

Now in verses 29 to 33, the Lord wants to seal this clearly in the minds of all who hear. And so He does what he very often does. He tells a simple story. It is an analogy, it is a parable, it is an illustration. It is not an allegory, it’s not mystical, it’s not fraught with secret meaning, it is a very simple story. In fact, if I may be so bold as to say, I do not understand why eschatology for some people is so confusing when our Lord made it so simple. He made it so simple. And all of this teaching He did not give to sophisticated theologians, He gave to very simple working men who were not only simple but hard headed and had difficulty grasping even simple things. Our Lord’s words are

uncomplicated and they are unmistakable. This is not to make things difficult. It is to make things easy. And yet the passage that I read to you this morning is one of the most difficult passages. If you look at the myriad of interpretations that have been given to it, I am really amazed at how the verses I read you have been convoluted by many, many interpreters of Scripture. So let's just look at it and take it as simple as the Lord intended us to take it. Let's put away our sophistication and just pretend, for the moment, that are simple minded fishermen, or workers with our hands, not sophisticated theologians, don't have a lot of backlog, don't have some great theological understanding, we don't even know what we here know, we know very little and listen to it with that kind of simplicity.

I'm going to show you three things...an analogy, an application and an authority. Just some hooks to hand the progression of this text on. An analogy, a simple analogy in fact, a specific application and a supernatural authority...let's look at the simple analogy. And again, please keep in mind, the Lord used illustrations to make things clear, not to confound people. They are not riddles. This is His analogy.

"Then He told them a parable. Behold the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and you know for yourselves that summer is near."

Now this is simply an obvious truth. If you see leaves, you know summer is coming. Leaves means it's spring. And then fruit comes in summer. That's it. That's all there is here, folks. Behold the fig tree and all the trees. And fig trees, by the way, were common in Israel and often used for spiritual analogies.

Jotham in the days of the Judges, according to Judges 9, 10 and 11, used fig tree as an analogy. Hosea in Hosea 9:10 used the fig tree as analogous to the patriarchs. Jeremiah in Jeremiah 24:2 referred to good and bad people like good and bad figs. And Joel, the prophet in chapter 1 verses 6 and 7, used fig tree as an illustration of Israel. So this is a very common part of their life and very useful to others in illustrating spiritual truths. Even our Lord used a fig tree as an illustration in Matthew 21 verses 18 to 22 to teach spiritual lessons to the disciples about barrenness in their own prayers. And that's also repeated in Mark chapter 11. So both in the Old Testament and in the teaching of the Lord, the fig tree served a purpose as an illustration. It is designed to help people understand. In fact, in Matthew 24:32 where the parallel text in Matthew's record is he says Jesus also said, "Now learn this parable of the fig tree." The point is, this is for your learning...manthano...this is so you can understand.

And the reason I press that point is because it seems to me that people turn these parables into very complex things when they are the most simple, especially when you have such a simple parable as this. Remember in Matthew 13:10 and 11, Jesus said to the disciples, "It is given to you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, to the others, it is not given. It's given to you to know." So He would tell parables and to the crowd He wouldn't explain them. And if they don't get an explanation, then you

don’t understand the illustration because it is, after all, only an illustration and if it has no explanation, you don’t know what it illustrates. But to you, He says, it is given to know these things, therefore you hear not only the parables, but I give you the understanding of what they illustrate.

What is the simplicity of this parable? If you look at a fig tree or for that matter, any tree, and you see it put forth leaves, softened and swelling with sap in the trunk and the branches in the spring, it begins to push out leaves. And by the way, precisely at the time our Lord is saying this, it is spring. It’s Passover, that’s spring. It is spring and probably in their view on the Mount of Olives, along with Olive trees doing the same thing, there were fig trees and other trees. And when you see leaves, you know for yourselves, nobody has to tell you, you know by virtue of your experience that summer is now near. Everybody understands that. Spring proceeds summer. If it’s spring and it’s spring when you see the leaves bud, then summer follows. Simple, simple analogy that you know what is coming by certain present signs. When you see the signs, leaves, you know summer’s near. And with summer comes fruit and harvest.

By the way, harvest is always, in the Old Testament, a symbol of judgment as well as blessing. So you have a simple analogy.

Now let’s move secondly to a specific application. What’s the point of this simple analogy? Here it is, verse 31, “Even so, you also, or you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the Kingdom of God is near.” Hey, I get it, do you get it? When you see these things happening, you know that the coming of the Kingdom is near, just like when you see the leaves you know that summer is near. It’s nothing more than that.

But the question that strikes me first is who is “you” here? When you see these things happen. Who is you? Well it has to be the people who see these things happen. Right? And then we have to ask, what are these things? And that takes you back to verse 20, the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies which triggers the great Tribulation. The signs in the sun, the moon, the stars, on the earth, the roaring of the sea and the waves, the powers of the heavens shaken, people in dismay, perplexity, dying from fear and expectation of what is coming...when you see those things, you then jumps all the way to those people who are believers in Christ who belong to Christ who are Christ’s people living in the time when those signs take place. The disciples are only symbolic of those people. They are only representative of that future group of people. You, meaning you believers, who are alive when you see these things happen. What the Lord is saying is, it’s going to come very fast.

You remember He told a parable about a man who went on a long journey? We’re living in the long journey. We’re living in the long time, two thousand years now. But once those signs start, once they start, you can be sure that when you see these things happen, the Kingdom of God is near. In fact, Mark says it in another fashion, quoting our Lord as putting it also this way, “Even so...Mark 13:29...when you see these things happen, recognize that He is near.” How near? “At the door,” Mark

13:29. The Kingdom is near, Luke, He is near, Mark, because you can't have the Kingdom without the King. So you know. When is He coming? What's the sign of His coming? What's the sign of the end of the age? When is His presence going to be here? When's He going to establish the promises and the Kingdom? "When you see these things happen, you can be sure the Kingdom is near because the King is at the door." This perfectly answers finally the question that started this whole discussion.

But how wonderful is the Lord's answer? Instead of jumping to the end, He tells us what to expect through all these years. He marks the specific sign at the end of time and then more signs as that last three and a half years unfolds, and right down to the end and He says, "When you see those things, you who see those things are going to be the same ones who see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory."

Now, that takes us to the next verse which seems obvious to me. The next verse, verse 32, "Truly I say to you, truly," I love that, as if the Lord needed to qualify anything He said by adding that? As if we had some question. Why does He say that? Why do we have in the Old English, "Verily, verily I say unto you," or "Truly, truly I say unto you?" It's for emphatic indication. It is for strong emphasis. "I am telling you the truth, this is unequivocal." And I think He says that very often because it's stunning and He wants to affirm the veracity of it. Truly I say to you, there's no mistaking this, folks, this generation, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. This generation.

What do you mean this generation? What generation? What is the antecedent of this? You would be amazed at all of the answers. Wow! Perhaps a very, very common answer that you may have heard, I've read an awful lot about this in recent years, is that this generation refers to the disciples...the disciples. That they are this genea, genea means generation, people, nation, stock, kind, it's a pretty generic term. That's where generic comes from actually. So it's a very broad term. But could, I suppose, linguistically be applied to the disciples and the people who were living at that very time. So some would say it refers specifically to the disciples. So Jesus is saying, this is all going to happen in your lifetime. Wow! If that's what He meant, He was wrong...He was wrong. And there are some people who say that. Yes, that's what He meant and He was wrong. And they're happy for that because He was wrong about this then He's not really God and He's not really authoritative and we don't have to pay any attention to all the other things He said about how we're supposed to behave.

And they say He admitted that He could be wrong because in Mark 13:32 He says, "No man knows the day nor the hour, no not even the Son of Man." So He admitted His own ignorance and so He said He sort of established the grounds on which He could be wrong. So He meant the disciples but He was wrong.

He did say that, that no man knows the day nor the hour, not even the Son of Man, but only the Father who is in heaven. But it's one thing for Him to voluntarily restrict His power which He did in His incarnation, right? Like He said, "I could if I wanted to, have a legion of angels, but I've chosen not to.

I could if I wanted to know all of that, but I've chosen not to." It's one thing for Him to restrict His knowledge in a self-imposed humiliation. It's quite another thing to be wrong. Those are not the same. And furthermore, by the way, after His incarnation was over, He ascended back to full fellowship face-to-face with the Father in full knowledge without the limitations of His self-emptying.

Secondly, there are some who suggest, and this is equally a popular one, that it refers to the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem. And what it means is, this generation of people living in Jerusalem at this time, including the disciples, but broader than that, all the populous of this place, they're going to live to the destruction of Jerusalem which is only 40 years from now, so this generation will not pass away before all these things come to pass. And this is the most popular amillennial view of this text. Reams have been written trying to defend this...hopelessly, I might add, because how in the world can you put into the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, how can you put plagues and pestilences and terrors in the sky? How can you put the devastation of the sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the powers of the heavens shaken? Come on, that's not 70 A.D. You have one nation, the Romans, coming and attacking Jerusalem. This is not the time which is indicated here in verse 22 as the days of divine vengeance, nor is it the time that all things which are written may be fulfilled. And certainly....certainly for sure, in 70 A.D. the Son of Man did not come in a cloud with power and great glory. Just not possible.

What happened in 70 A.D. was a preview, a mini-preview of the great destruction to come. Others say it refers to the Jewish race, that it simply means that the Jews will survive till the end. They will not perish as a race. This genea, meaning this race...genea can mean that.

Jesus is predicting the survival of the Jewish race. That doesn't make sense because they already knew they had an everlasting covenant, that's why they posed the questions. They already knew God had made promises which we read about in Galatians chapter 3, made to Abraham which God will fulfill to those who are in Christ. They already knew that God had determined an eternal destiny for them, that God had made promises which were never going to be voided. They knew that the Messiah was their Messiah, the Lord was their Lord, and He would come and establish the Kingdom. He told them that. They didn't need to be told that they were going to survive because they already had an everlasting promise that had been reiterated to them by the Messiah Himself.

Another one. Some people say that this generation means the bad people...this generation. That using genea in the sense of an evil generation. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's sometimes used for the word door in Hebrew which can refer to an evil generation or a righteous generation. And what our Lord is saying is, they're going to be wicked people all the way till the Second Coming. Is that news? We don't need...we don't need affirmation that we have an everlasting covenant and we don't need affirmation that they're going to be sinners until the end. It makes no sense, no point. There's no point in saying they're going to be Christ-rejecters until the end, or there are going to be evil people until the end. It's very vague. And why would He make such a

point when it’s absolutely obvious?

Another one that is very popular, popularized by Hal Lindsey in the book The Late Great Planet Earth and some other books that came from that one, it refers to the people who see the birth of the nation Israel. Have you heard that one? And this is based on the fact that the fig tree is an allegorical picture of Israel, that Israel is the fig tree and if you see the fig tree bud, you’re seeing Israel becoming a nation. That happened in 1948, by the way. Israel became a nation.

Well, in Matthew and Mark, they both speak of the fig tree but Luke adds something. Luke says in verse 29, “Behold the fig tree and all the trees,” showing that this is not something limited to the fig tree which then could be identified with Israel, this is just a general principle, true of a fig tree and true of all trees. Thank you, Luke, for putting that in. It’s a general observation. It’s an analogy, not an allegory. And by the way, when that came out, that viewpoint, that generation that was alive in 1948 would see the return of Christ, that conjured up a huge response. That book became the all-time best Christian book seller and here we are, and that generation is gone. If the generation according to that book is 40 years, that all ended in ‘88. We’re twenty years passed that and the Lord hasn’t come. So if you’re still holding on to that view, let it go. It’s over, folks, it’s over. That one’s gone. To start out with it was imaginative any way.

You see how complicated things can get? Let me tell you how simple this is. Verse 32, “Truly I say to you, this generation....” What generation? “The generation that sees these things happen will not die until it’s all taken place.” Whoever is among the you who sees these things happen can know this, it’s going to happen soon in your life time. If you see the beginning, you’re going to be there for the end. If you see Jerusalem surrounded, if you’re alive and you see Jerusalem surrounded and you see the changes...the devastating changes in the universe, you see those signs, you will see the Son of Man. Such a simple thing. If you see the leaves, you know summer is near. If you see the signs, you know Christ is near, He’s at the door. And our Lord is simply saying, you asked Me a question, you asked Me what do we look for? What are the signs? And I’m telling you this, that generation alive that sees these things will see the Son of Man return. Our Lord is answering the question. And it will come very soon, very soon. As those things begin to disintegrate in the final few years of the Tribulation, and particularly in the final months of the final year and the Lord then comes in glory and as Daniel points out, you have a 75-day transition from the judgments at the end of the Tribulation brought by the return of Christ to the establishment of His Kingdom, it all happens fast. If you’re alive and you see the signs and you survive through that and you’re not martyred, and we’re talking about believers here, believers who are alive and looking and waiting for the coming of Christ...if you’re alive when all of that starts, you’re going to be there when He returns and you’re going to go into His Kingdom. That’s all it means. If this is looking for an antecedent, the obvious antecedent is you in verse 31...you...you. It is this generation, the you that sees these things, that will see it all take place.

Now at this point I have to interject something. I...the way I understand the Scripture and its stood the test of time, believe me, and the test of the text through all these years, I don't believe this is going to include the church because I am convinced that the way to understand the New Testament is that the church will be taken out and then the judgments begin and then a great evangelistic effort begins and people will be converted after the church is gone. They will constitute this generation in the midst of all of this, looking for the return of Christ. And if they survive the persecution, if they're martyred, of course, they'll go the presence of the Lord. If they survive the persecution, they will then see the King come and establish His Kingdom.

People always say to me, "What is the evidence for a Rapture of the church before all of this?" And I will just tell you this. It's implicit, not explicit. It is the best way that I can understand the Scripture. And I'll just give you a few reasons why I am still convinced of this.

First of all, in Revelation 1, 2 and 3...Revelation 1, 2 and 3, you have the church, the word occurs nineteen times. It's heavy on the church. A great vision of the church in chapter 1 in which the Lord is ministering in the church. And you have the churches being addressed and the letters to the churches in chapter 2 and 3. After chapter 3, everything that goes on on earth, all the things that are said, all the warnings, all the descriptions, all the visions totally void of any reference to the church. One could conclude just by that, that the church doesn't appear to be here. Add to that, that in chapters 4 and 5 you go to heaven. Before the Tribulation begins in chapter 6, chapters 4 to 5 you go to heaven and what do you find in heaven? You find a group called the Twenty-Four Elders which, as hard as I can work at it, are best understood as the glorified church. There are a number of reasons why.

They have crowns which are promised to the church. There are many other features that indicate the 24 elders to be the church. So you have the church on earth in 1 through 3. You have the church in heaven in 4 and 5. And you have the Tribulation break out on earth in chapter 6. Then you have chapter 19, Christ coming back at the end of that time and coming with Him are the saints clothed in white and fine linen which is used to describe just prior to that the saints in heaven. So we are in heaven for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, for our reward time and we come back with Christ at the end of the time of Tribulation. That seems to be a consistent way to understand the book of Revelation.

A second thing to think about is that there are no warnings of any kind nor is there any instruction given to the church about how to endure the future time of Tribulation. We don't even get addressed as how to survive in an Antichrist world, how to survive when the whole universe is collapsing, etc., etc. In fact, all that comes to us is about our blessed hope, looking for Christ, waiting for His appearing, longing to be with Him. Titus 2:13, the glorious appearing of Christ, this blessed hope. So what is told to the church is not strong on warning, it is strong on hope.

Thirdly, the Rapture is defined in 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4 and John 14, three places. And in each case it is the church taken into heaven, taken out of the world and taken to heaven. There's no judgment. Christ does not come to earth, He takes us to heaven. If that is describing the Second Coming, as some would say, and it comes at the end of the Tribulation, what's the point? What does He do? At the end, call us up and then bring us back? What's the up and down for? It doesn't make sense. If He's called us up to go to a place He's prepared for us, if He's called us up to meet our Bridegroom, if He's called us up to be rewarded, that makes sense. And then to come back with Him when He comes to reign. But if at the end we are snatched up into the air to be with the Lord, what is the point or coming immediately back?

And then another thought. If, as some say, we are raptured at the end of the Tribulation, then the scene would look like this: Christ comes, destroys all the wicked, they're all dead, none of them are alive on the earth, all of them are destroyed, the day of the Lord, no one survives. And if all believers are raptured, right? What does that mean? You receive a glorified body and you're transformed. Then you have a big problem. Who populates the earthly Kingdom? You've got no unbelievers and you've got no living believers, so who populates the Kingdom? So who has babies? So who populates the nations? So where do the sinners come from that Christ rules with a rod of iron? Where do the sinners come from that rebel at the end of the Millennial Kingdom? Where do the Gentiles come from who are hanging on the garment of a Jew and wanting to be taken to meet Christ? You have to have people survive, godly people, saints, believers survive the persecution and the horrors of the Tribulation so that you have sheep to go into the Kingdom to populate the Kingdom for a thousand years.

And then Revelation 3:10...Revelation 3:10, just one verse that might help you and there are many other things to say about this, but I'm just giving you some things to think about...Revelation 3:10, very interesting verse and comes, of course, to the church as a promise. "Because you have kept the Word of My perseverance," which is another way of saying you've been faithful to My Word, because you've been steadfast, because you have a persevering salvation which is the real thing, because you've kept My Word, "I will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth."

There is an hour coming of testing, an hour of trial, an hour of Tribulation coming on the whole world, I will keep you from that hour, tereo ek, keep you out from, ek meaning out from a specific hour. He's not saying, "I promise you this, you'll never have any trouble in life," that would be ridiculous. "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials," same word. We're going to have those things, but there is an hour, that is a specific time from which we will be kept, out of which we will be kept. That, I think, is a promise of deliverance that is consistent with 1 Corinthians 15, John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4.

Well I could say a lot more about that, but we'll leave it at that for the moment. At the Rapture, the church meets Christ in the air. At the Second Coming, the church returns with Christ to the earth. At

the Rapture we go to heaven. At the Second Coming, we come to earth. At the Rapture, the Mount of Olives is untouched. At the Second Coming it is touched and split. At the Rapture, living saints are translated. At the Second Coming, no one is translated into heaven. At the Rapture the world is not judged, there's no judgment, sin gets worse. At the Second Coming, sin is judged, the world is ruled by righteousness. At the Rapture the body goes to heaven. At the Second Coming it comes to earth. The Rapture is eminent. The Second Coming has distinct signs. The Rapture concerns only the saved. The Second Coming concerns the saved and the lost.

So I pick this point to just make this distinction. We're talking about you, this generation, we're talking about the people who have come to faith after the Rapture of the church during the time of the Tribulation. That generation that is still alive to see these signs will see the end. They see the leaves, they'll see summer. They feel the birth pains, they'll be there for the event itself. This is just clear, straightforward instruction.

It leads to a third point and a brief one but critical. From a simple analogy to a specific application to a supernatural authority...a supernatural authority. The next verse says, "Heaven and earth will pass away." Heaven and earth will pass away.

By the way, that is what happens after the Kingdom, right? The King is near, the Kingdom is near. But after the Kingdom, heaven and earth will pass away. That is true, my friend, that is true. I watched something this week on the Discovery Channel about Antarctic ice melt and how things have changed and people who had been there 50 years ago went back and saw all this. And they're saying if we don't do something, we're going to lose this planet. We've got to save it for this generation, the next generation. Let me tell you, folks. Relax. Heaven and earth will pass away. Just enjoy it while it's here. I promise you, you won't save it. You will not save it. Look, I'm not advocating stomping on flowers, I'm not advocating...I'm not advocating letting your grass die. I'm not advocating killing animals and being irresponsible. Look, God put Adam in the Garden to tend it, didn't He? So let's tend what we've got but look, yes it will be destroyed. Don't spend your whole life trying to fight God. You can't save the planet. You can't save the planet.

So, you know, you hear these people and they're so exercised about needing to save the planet. Now I just want to say to them, "Hey, hey, hey, pick another job, get another career." You know. If you want to save the planet, be a gardener, be a farmer, grow something. But all this harangue is pointless. Heaven and earth will pass away.

You say, "Oh, it's terrible, we're sending all this junk up in space." Don't worry about it. Long before all that junk has any effect, the whole thing is going to dissolve. And it's going to dissolve in a way described in 2 Peter chapter 3 that indicates atomic destruction, implosion, uncreation, the elements melting with fervent heat. The elements, meaning the things that are in a row, the atomic structure. The heavens pass away with a crackling loud noise. The earth melting. It's going to happen. And it is

going to follow the Kingdom.

Isaiah says it. And the book of Revelation says it. A new heaven and a new earth and Peter says it. Second Peter chapter 2 verse 13, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, the final state. Can't save the planet. It will go out of existence by the Word of God just as it came into existence by the Word of God. And Peter uses the analogy of the Flood, just as the Flood came and destroyed the world except for eight people, by the Word of God so this kind of judgment will come by the Word of God...God will send this destructive stuff at the end of the Tribulation, then by His Word He'll stop it all, reverse it and you'll have a renewed, restored earth for a thousand years, at the end of which the whole universe goes out of existence and in its place a new heaven and a new earth.

So if you're looking for a chronology to your eschatology, there it is. You have history, time of Tribulation. At the end of Tribulation, an escalation of fearful signs and the dissolution and destruction of the universe in the way that we know it in its renovation. You have Christ coming, judges the ungodly and rewards the saints. Takes them into His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God comes for a thousand years. At the end of that Kingdom, there is the new heaven and the new earth. There's your eschatology. Jesus laid it out, it couldn't be more clear. The only component here that isn't clearly revealed is the role of the church. But remember, at this particular point the church hadn't begun until Acts chapter 2. And so its unique identity is yet to be indicated.

Now, one final thing to say and this is critical. I told you there's a supernatural authority here. The Lord doesn't say heaven and earth will pass away to make an eschatological point. It is true, it is true and it is eschatologically accurate and it is in the right chronology. But He doesn't say it for that reason, He says it for this reason. Verse 33, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will not pass away."

What are You saying? What I have just told you is absolutely the way it will be. This is it. The only reason our Lord speaks of heaven and earth passing away is to contrast it, and it's, of course, typical of His genius to move from that eschatological point to a point that He wants to establish that His Word will never pass away. It is a supernatural Word. You cannot add to it, you cannot take from it. Scripture gives that testimony both in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy, at the end of the book of Revelation. We heard this at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the first sermon He ever preached, Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, verses 17 and 18 He said, "Not one jot, not one tittle, will ever pass from My law until all is fulfilled."

Back in Luke 16:17, in the middle of His ministry, said it here at the beginning, said it here at the end, said it in the middle, it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away then for one stroke of a letter of the law to fall. Boy, that is an amazing statement, isn't it? It doesn't seem to me too easy for the whole universe to go out of existence, any easier than to bring it into existence. But it's easier for that to happen then for one stroke, one stroke of one letter to fail in the Word of God.

This is the truth, folks. This is the way it will be. Isaiah 40 and verse 8, “The flower fades and the grass withers, but the Word of the Lord endures...how long?...forever..forever.” All that I’ve said is absolutely true. This is the way it will be. And here we are living and we can see already that the age between the first and the second coming to be indicated to us in the general signs of deception and disaster and persecution, we’ve laid that all out, are just exactly accurate. We could even see previews coming of the day when Jerusalem will be surrounded, they’re already surrounded ideologically, and in terms of animosity by everything to the east of them that wants to obliterate them from the face of the earth. This is how it is. This is how it will be.

If you will close by looking at 1 Peter 1:23 with me, 1 Peter 1:23. “For you have been born again, you have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable. That is through the living and abiding Word of God for...and here’s this quote from Isaiah 40...all flesh is like grass, all its glory like the flower of grass, the grass withers, the flower falls off, but the Word of the Lord abides forever, and this is the Word which was preached to you.”

What’s the point? The point is simply this. You were saved by the living and abiding Word. It will not fail in your salvation. It does not fail to save, nor will it fail in your glorification. The Word of God is the same true abiding unassailable, unchanging truth when it speaks of the future as when it speaks of the present or of the past. You were saved through the living and abiding Word and you will be brought to glory through that same living abiding Word. Whatever God says is absolutely the way it is, whether He speaks of salvation, or sanctification, or glorification. And we look forward to the unfolding of this.

You say, “Well I don’t know if I want to be raptured cause I’d like to be there.” Oh, you’ll be there for the big moment. I’d rather be in heaven with Jesus than on earth going through this. But you’ll be there in the great moment, returning in glory with Christ to reign with Him in His Kingdom and then forever. That is if you know Him. Only those who know Him will be taken to heaven. It could happen at any moment. It is a signless, imminent event, it is the next thing, no signs necessary...signs before the Second Coming, no signs before the Rapture, we live in the light that at any moment in any fraction of a moment, trumps sounds, the angel calls and we go. This is the next event in God’s plan. It’s only for those who know and love Christ. We’re here to serve you and help you.

We have a prayer room to my right under the exit sign over there. We’d love to talk with you about that after the service. If you have questions we want you to come to know Christ, forgiveness of sin, salvation, the hope of heaven. We’re here to serve you. If you want help on a spiritual problem, want to know about joining the church, any spiritual need, that’s why we’re here. And this church, I trust, will be here faithful until these things take place. Let’s pray.

Father, thank You again for the wonderful truth You've laid out for us. It is so rich and so straightforward. We thank You for the hope that we have, the blessed hope. We thank You that You are calling out a people from among the nations even now to Yourself. And we pray, Lord, that You would make all who are here this morning a part of that people. Be gracious to sinners who are not yet saved from future judgment. Save sinners, Lord, turn them to repentance and true faith in Christ alone for their salvation. We pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).