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

The Believer's Gift to Christ
Scripture: Luke 21:34-36
Code: 42-265

We are obviously in the midst of the largest, longest, most elaborate and most expensive celebration in the western world, Christmas. Nothing even comes close to it. In fact, you could collect all other holidays celebrated in the western world, put them together and they wouldn't approximate Christmas. More activity goes on, more events, more spending, more celebrating, more parties, more everything than with any other event.

In fact, this is surely the most well-known ancient story in all of western civilization, the story of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it's interesting to me that the world would spend so much time and so much effort for good and bad reasons to accumulate such a massive event as to what Christmas has become, realizing that at the heart of it all, it is to mark the birth of the Son of God. It is amazing what the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ two thousand years ago has set in motion in terms of society. And it seems to me it gets bigger every year. It certainly starts earlier every year...for sure. Though the main event historically is the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, that no longer is the simple reality of Christmas...that has been severely obscured and confused and clouded by unrelated silliness like Santa Claus and reindeer and all the entourage that goes with that. And mix in a few winter items and somehow you get a rather confused scenario.

But still, the reason for all of this at the heart is the birth of the Son of God. The world has literally created its biggest party around that event. There will not be a party the next time He comes. In fact, the Bible says all enterprise business will cease when He comes. It will be the end of everything. The Bible says no more music, no more singing, no more joy, no more celebration the next time He comes.

For some reason the first coming of the Lord Jesus is politically correct, it leads to some extent, although our society is whittling away at it, however the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is not politically correct. It is popular. To sentimentalize, the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is not popular to proclaim the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The world is very eager to embrace a baby in a manger, but not at all interested in embracing a sovereign Lord coming in power and glory out of the sky to judge the world. And yet, when our Lord was ready to leave this earth, He said, "I will come again." Physically, literally, historically just as He came the first time. The first time He came as a baby to save sinners. The second time He comes in full deity and glory to judge sinners and to establish His Kingdom.

The Bible tells the story of His first coming in detail. The Bible tells the story of His Second Coming equally in detail. In fact, the most dramatic revelation concerning this Second Coming of Jesus Christ comes from His own lips. Jesus gave instruction to His disciples concerning His Second Coming. The world that He said, all on one evening in Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives to His disciples are recorded in Matthew, chapters 24 and 25, Mark chapter 13, and Luke chapter 21. I want you to look at Luke chapter 21 and I want to show you what our Lord said about His return.

Let me read in verse 25 and following. “The disciples had asked a question, what will be the signs of Your coming? What should we look for?” Our Lord has given a lengthy answer, but coming right down to the very event in verse 25 He said this, “There will be 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 literally dying from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

With those words, our Lord says there will be signs just prior to His final return to judge sinners and to establish the saints in His Kingdom. There will be signs, signs in the sky and signs on the earth. He has already said much about that in this chapter earlier. Matthew records, Mark records even more words concerning those signs. The specificity of those signs is described in careful detail in the book of Revelation, starting in chapter 6 and running all the way to chapter 19. Literally there is a devastating reorientation of the entire universe as we know it. It effects the stars, it effects the sun, it effects the moon, all the heavenly bodies. It effects this planet, fresh water, salt water, plant life, animal life, human life. It effects seasons. It effects day and night. Therefore it effects the growth of plants, food, everything. Devastating judgments and then the coming of the Son of Man in power and great glory.

Now what our Lord did not say is exactly when this would happen. Will it happen? It will happen, absolutely it will happen. Verse 33 says, “Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will not pass away.” If He said it, it’s true, it will happen. What we don’t know is when it will happen. That is why our Lord said in Luke chapter 12 and verse 40, “You too be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Matthew 25:13, He said, “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.” We don’t know when the Lord is going to come. We don’t know when the first event of the eschaton, the first event of the end will take place. We don’t know. It could happen at any time. It is the Rapture of the church and it triggers all the other events that lead finally to judgment and the destruction of the universe and its replacement with a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal state. We don’t know when it’s going to begin.

Every generation lives with the reality that it could happen at any time. The first event that triggers all the events of the end and they sweep through seven years of judgments, according to the Old

Testament and the New Testament. The church is taken out, a signless event, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, gone. Christians all over the planet disappear. Then judgments begin to unfold over a seven-year period, ending with the Lord's return and the destruction in casting into hell of all unbelievers all over the planet. And then He establishes His earthly kingdom for a thousand years and reigns in a kingdom of peace and righteousness and after that the literal uncreation and implosion of the whole universe and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth wherein will dwell all believers in the presence of God forever. We don't know when that sequence begins.

We talk about that as being imminent, meaning next...no sign will precede the beginning of those eschatological events. The New Testament is full of warnings about these things. It's also full of encouragement about these things because the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is both frightening to the nonbeliever and encouraging to the believer.

In Titus, Paul's letter to Titus, chapter 2 and verse 13 is a good summation of New Testament instruction about His coming. It says there in verse 12 of chapter 2, Titus 2:12, that we are to deny ungodliness, and deny worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, the age that exists now, this age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. For believers it is a blessed hope. We're looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His own because He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us. We're looking for the one who redeemed us. He's coming for us. He said, "I'm going away to prepare a place for you, when I come, I'll take you to the place I've prepared for you." So for Christians, this is a glorious appearing. This is a wondrous hope.

In fact, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, we again are instructed with hopeful language where it says, "The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God, the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and will ever be with the Lord." And then this, "Comfort one another with these words." This is our hope. This is our comfort. This is our joyous anticipation.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 4, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which is given you in Christ Jesus that in everything you are enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was concerned in you so that you're not lacking in any gift, waiting eagerly for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yes, it's our hope. We wait eagerly. We say with John, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." For the believers, this is our great hope.

James writes in chapter 5 verse 7, "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Be patient. Strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand." We need to be patient, encouraged, anxious, eager, waiting, all that in balance until the Lord comes. For us this is a joyous hope. And we know at the same time, for the world it is devastating. Once the church is taken out, horrors come on this earth for seven-year period, the second half particularly, the judgments are

inexplicable. They could not be comprehended, the likes of which the world has never ever even imagined, leading up to the return of Christ, to judge all those who have rejected Him and to take into His glorious Kingdom all who have believed.

As our Lord speaks in this text of His Second Coming, He is speaking to His disciples. So the message is to believers. And He gives some exhortations regarding His coming at the end of this section. Look back to Luke 21. His last words on this subject appear in verses 34 to 36. Here they are. “Be on guard that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and worries of life and that day come on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Our Lord has said so much about His Second Coming. It fills all the prior verses in this chapter, starting in verse 7. It fills the thirteenth chapter of Mark and it fills two chapters in Matthew...Matthew 24 and 25. The Lord has a lot to say. And at the very, very end of what He has to say comes this directive, “Be on guard, keep on the alert,” and some very specific instructions. And that’s what I want you to look at today.

What...to put it in a Christmas context...what gifts would the Lord want us to give Him the next time He comes? We know what the gifts were the first time He came. We know that the wise men brought gold, frankincense and myrrh. They brought them because they felt that they were appropriate gifts, suitable for a King. And even though He received a cross and not a throne, nonetheless He was a King and next time He comes back there will be a throne, the throne of the whole world. And what gifts are appropriate for the King to be given to Him by His people? Clearly He’s not going to expect anything tangible, for He will have entered into His full glory, His humiliation past, He will have received all that belongs to Him originally and eternally. And so there will be nothing material that we could give to Him. There would be no sense in giving Him anything that our hands could hold. He wants something far different than that. In fact, I think in these verses that I just read you, there are four gifts that the Lord would want from us to be given to Him the next time He comes...four gifts. They are heart gifts, soul gifts, inward gifts.

First of all, the Lord would desire vigilant anticipation...vigilant anticipation. That’s indicated in the two commands in verse 34 and 36, “Be on guard.” Verse 36, “But keep on the alert at all times.” Talking about vigilance, talking about watchfulness, talking about readiness. You never want to forget the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. It should be in the front of our minds all the time. First Thessalonians chapter 1 describes a model church and it says, finally, that this model church in Thessalonica was waiting for God’s Son from heaven. A church should always be living in expectation. It should always be a Second Coming church. For many churches, this is not even discussed or presented. It is, if anything, avoided. And therein is lost a massive and formidable and essential and divinely demanded motivation on how to live our lives, we are to live our lives in the realization that the Lord Jesus could

come at any moment...any moment.

The whole eschatological scenario could begin at any moment. There is no sign preliminary to the Rapture of the church which launches everything. It is incumbent then upon every generation of people who profess to be Christians to live in the light of the fact that the Lord could come at any moment, to always be on guard, always be alert because He could come any time.

Now in Luke's record of our Lord's teaching, he doesn't give us everything the Lord said to illustrate the need for readiness, but Matthew does. Matthew records come illustrations of the need for readiness. So let's go to Matthew 24:36, same evening, Wednesday evening of Passion Week, same time sitting on the Mount of Olives talking to the disciples. And our Lord had more to say then what Luke records but the Spirit of God placed it for us in Matthew's gospel. Let's go down to verse 36 of Matthew 24. This is the parallel text to the one in Luke.

Verse 36 says, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son but the Father alone." This is the thing you must understand at the beginning, no one knows when this all begins. The interesting thing in verse 36 is no one knows, not even the Son. Well we know the Father knows. We can understand that the angels may not know, they're not omniscient, they're created beings. But how is it that the Son doesn't know? Well that's easy to understand. In the incarnation, Jesus, God in human flesh, places upon Himself limitations, self-imposed limitations. Yes, He continued to be God with all the attributes of God, fully functioning, but there were some self-imposed limitations. He had power that He didn't use. He had knowledge that He didn't use. So in His humiliation, there is a limitation of even His own knowledge.

When He went back to heaven in the ascension, He went back to heaven and re-engaged fully God face to face. And He possessed in that moment the glory which He had before He ever came into this world so that now He knows everything. But in self-imposed limitations on earth as a part of His incarnation, He set aside the prerogatives of knowing as He set aside the prerogatives of power for the time that He was here on earth, expressing some omniscience, occasionally, and certainly great power as well occasionally. But nothing like what He possessed before He came and since He has returned. But we don't know when He is coming.

Verse 37 then imposes on us an urgent understanding of the need to be ready. And it takes us back to the story of Noah. "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah, for as in those days which were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark." The point of that is not that the eating and drinking was some indication of sin or that marrying or giving in marriage is some indication of sin, none of those are. Eating and drinking is necessary and so is marrying and giving in marriage. What it's saying is life as usual, life as usual. Another way to say it is they paid absolutely no attention to what Noah was saying. Now remember, Noah is in virtually a desert building a ship the size of the

Queen Mary. And there is no place to float it in the desert. And it takes him a hundred and twenty years to build it. And for a hundred and twenty years he is telling people it's going to rain. There has never been rain. He says it's going to rain. They don't even know what rain is. He says there's going to be a Flood. They don't know what a flood is because there's no rain. They pay no attention to him. They think he's bereft of his senses.

So, on the day that it rains, verse 39, they're trapped in misunderstanding. They didn't understand it till the Flood came, took them all away. Too late, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. The world will not be ready. You can preach the Second Coming and preach it and preach it and preach it as preachers have done through the years, and the world pays no attention. They're happy about the first coming. They are disinterested in the Second Coming.

Every year at this time I start getting phone calls from news television programs, cable programs. They want me to come and talk about the birth of Christ. I was unable to do the programs that I often did this year because of some other commitment. No one has ever asked me if I would come and talk about the Second Coming of Christ. Could you explain to us what's going to happen? Could you tell us what it means in the Bible that the sun goes dark, the moon goes dark, the stars fall, the earth shakes, etc., etc. No one has ever asked me that.

Now if I wrote Harry Potter and the end of the world....or some fantasy about that...I would be in big demand. But reality concerning the Second Coming of Christ, that is politically incorrect. Nobody is interested in that. And so the world goes on, eating and drinking, giving in marriage, marrying and marrying just like in the days of Noah until it's too late, the door is shut and the rain comes and the flood comes and all humanity, except eight souls, are gone into eternal hell. Life as usual. There will be two men in the field, verse 41, one will be taken, one will be left. Two women grinding at the mill, one will be taken, one will be left. Life as usual. People doing their work, working in a field, grinding in a mill. One of them taken in judgment, one left to enter into the Kingdom of Christ. Like the judgment of the sheep and goats.

Therefore, verse 42, "Be on the alert, you don't know which day the Lord is coming." Again the reminder. You can't just live like the world...indifferent. Be sure of this, verse 43, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert, would not have allowed his house to be broken into." Thieves don't call and say, "Hey, by the way, I'm coming at nine. I'm going to break in your house at 9:10, I'm going to be out of there by 9:30." If we knew that, we'd stop him. We don't know when the thief comes and we don't know when the Lord comes either. Verse 44 again, he repeats it. "For this reason you be ready too for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think he will."

And he tells another story, "Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master

finds doing when he so comes." When you know your master is coming back and you have been given an assignment, you're going to be blessed if when he gets back he finds you doing what he asked you to do. And if he comes back and finds you not doing what he asks you to do, you're in trouble. If you are found doing what he asked you to do, verse 47 says, he'll put you in charge of all his possessions. Look, if you can be trusted when the boss is not there, he'll give you more responsibility, right? If you only work when the boss is looking at you and when the boss disappears, you take advantage of that to demonstrate your disloyalty, believe me, you're not going anywhere in your job. But if when the boss is gone you work hard, he comes back, finds that out, he'll give you more responsibility. It's a simple principle. That evil slave, however, in verse 48 says, "Ah, my master's not coming for a long time," and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards." Takes advantage of his opportunity. "The master of that slave will come on a day when he doesn't expect him, at an hour he doesn't know, and cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, weeping shall be there and gnashing of teeth." Pretty graphic language, right? That's hell, eternal judgment.

We expect unbelievers to live indifferently and irresponsibly. We expect the unregenerate, those who are not Christians, to live indifferently and with no regard for the Lord. We expect them to say, "Hey, where is God? Where's the promise of His coming? Are you kidding me? Jesus coming back to judge the earth? What a joke that is." To go out and live either indifferently or outright immorally as if they had no responsibility and some day when the Lord comes back at a moment they think not, they will be cut to pieces. A very graphic description of devastating judgment.

But certainly we don't expect believers to take advantage of the absence of the Lord in some irresponsible way. He will come. He will come. We don't know when He will come. And so, we live in perpetual vigilance, a vigilant anticipation, never letting that out of our minds. He could come at any moment...He could come at any time...He could come at any day. This needs to be kept before the church at all times. This is one of the gifts that our Lord wants from us. When He comes...Oh, we expected You, we expected You. We've been waiting, we're ready.

That leads to a second gift, spiritual separation...spiritual separation. And it's implied by the first one, vigilance leads to holiness, virtue. You could say it this way, vigilance leads to virtue. If vigilant anticipation is present, then spiritual separation follows. That's why in Luke 21 there is a result clause and the result clause is very obvious. "Be on guard so that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap." You don't want, as a believer now, He's talking to believers, He's talking to His disciples and all the disciples in the future that they represent, in every generation there are those who really belong to Christ, it is to them that He is speaking, you want to live in such anticipation of the coming of Christ that your heart is not burdened down with sin so that when the Lord comes you are caught, trapped. What that imagery is that everything stops at that moment and you're there where you were caught. So that mepote is the result, consequence clause. Hearts, kardia in the Greek, inner person, you

want to so live that when the Lord comes you can give Him the gift of a heart that is not weighted down with sin, weighted down, overpowered, burdened, pressed. It's used, this verb, bareo translated weighted down, it's used of heavy sleepy eyes overcome with sleep.

In Matthew 26:43 and Luke 9:23, in 2 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, it's used of excessive burdens that overwhelm a person. The idea is, you don't want the Lord to come back in a moment when you are under the weight of sin. Is it forgiven? Of course. But it is possible for Christians...not only possible, it is inevitable that we will sin. But the imagery here is not of you sinning because we will sin, but of you literally being under a pile of sin. And He uses some characteristic sins as general examples, dissipation. By the way, that word literally means the nausea that accompanies debauchery. The nausea that accompanies the sins of debauchery which were common in the ancient world, alcohol consumption and gluttony. You eat and drink until you literally are nauseous and vomiting.

This is what went on in the ancient world, very often connected with religion. And drunkenness He actually refers to, methe. These are symbolic of worldly excess, succumbing to the intoxicating iniquitous conduct of the world. Drunkenness and its subsequent base behavior has always been an issue since right after the Fall when you have drunkenness in the book of Genesis and the lewdness that goes with it. And He adds, "The worries of life." Life, biotikos, biological life, the worries of life simply has reference to issues, struggles, temptations, matters of this world. Very general, the world of the flesh, the devil...the world of sin. It's really a call to holy living is what it is. You want to make sure that when the Lord comes, you aren't trapped under some behavior or behaviors of sin. You will forfeit your reward. You will forfeit your reward. "Look to yourselves that you lose not the things you've wrought but receive a full reward." You will forfeit your reward. This is a call to holiness.

This isn't the only one, by any means, in the New Testament. Let me remind you of a few other familiar ones, very important. Romans 13....Romans 13, verse 11, "Knowing the time, understanding the time, it is already the hour for you to waken from sleep spiritually, for now your salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." What does he mean? Salvation in the sense of final salvation, final glorification, the coming of Christ, or even your leaving this earth in death to be with Him. Your final salvation is nearer than ever. Of course, the night is almost gone, the day is at hand, speaking of the coming of the Lord. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness, put on the armor of life, let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust because you don't want to be engaged in that kind of behavior when the Lord comes and you'll be trapped and caught in that very sin. This would be a shame. And that's what John says. Look at 1 John 2:18...2:28, 1 John 2:28....well, let me start with 18, 1 John 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour," I just wanted to grab that thought. "It is the last hour, this is the last period of history." John knew it, though it stretched on for a while, a day with the Lord is like a thousand years, a thousand years is a day, it's not a long time to Him. It is the last hour, we're living in the last hour in the sense that the Lord came, He died, He rose, He ascended. The next event is the end. We live in

the last hour.

Now drop down to verse 28, “In light of that, now, little children, abide in Him.” Abide in Him, what does that mean? Be obedient to Him, be faithful to Him, live in the sphere of His will so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away in shame at His coming. You don’t want to be caught in a trap when He comes and be ashamed.

In verse 3 of chapter 3...well, verse 2, “We are now the children of God. It is not appeared as yet what we shall be, we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.” When He comes and we see Him, we’ll be made like Him.
“And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself just as He is pure.”

When you live in the light of the Second Coming, it gives you vigilance and vigilance turns into separation from sin. It’s a call to holy living so that the day doesn’t come and trap you under the burden of sin. And then will come shame and the loss of eternal reward. Who would want to give that up?

So what gifts can we offer Christ the second time He comes? Vigilant anticipation, spiritual separation, a third one implied in verse 35, I think it’s important, evangelistic occupation...evangelistic occupation. The point is strongly implied in this verse. Back to Luke 21 verse 35, “For it will come, that day is the antecedent, that day will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.” The final judgments in what is called in the Old and the New Testament, “The day of the Lord, the final vengeance of our God, the day of final judgment is universal. It will come on all those who dwell on the face of all the earth, just as in the case of Noah which is a parallel to that, as in the case of Noah, the judgment drown the whole of the human race on the planet with the exception of eight souls, so the judgment come will fall upon all those on the face of the earth...all of them.

What does that do to us as believers? It intensifies our obligation and responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission...the Great Commission. In fact, the Lord does not come finally to judge and set up His Kingdom until the gospel has been preached to the ends of the earth. Universal judgment should lead us to understand and to demonstrate compassion toward the lost and the perishing. Jesus even wept over the city of Jerusalem. God finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Judgment is not God’s favorite responsibility. Each and every unregenerate sinner will fall under the final wrath of God and what we would want the Lord to receive from us as a gift when He returns would be a life consumed with evangelistic occupation. We’re losing this, seriously losing it.

First of all, there’s a movement in evangelicalism, whatever that is, to affirm that everybody who believes anything about God, or anything about Jesus is a Christian. And even people who don’t believe in Jesus or the God of the Bible, worship God in their own way and they’re all going to heaven. So you have this growing universalism that is sort of going to leave God in a very difficult

position because there won't be anybody to judge...if these people are right, and, of course, they're not. So you have that trend to reclassify everybody with any kind of religious perspective or intention as bound for heaven, and that sucks the heart out of evangelism because we no longer see these people as doomed and damned and perishing.

But you also have in the contemporary scene in evangelicalism, the idea that the whole purpose for which God and Jesus exist and the whole purpose for which the quasi-church exists is to make you comfortable...to make sure you're making no sacrifices, feeling no pain. The typical modern contemporary preacher wants to give you a spiritual anesthetic, put you to sleep, sort of jolt you into nirvana, fulfill all your dreams, fulfill all your desires, all your hopes, all your ambitions. Get rid of all your pain just to anesthetize you, your comfort is the consuming idea.

If I go through another airport and see another copy of a book called Your best life now, I don't know if I can contain myself. And they buy them like mad. I'd like to put a book in there that says, How To Lose Your Life in Rescuing Sinners From Hell. Who would carry that? No one. But that is the call of the church. We don't have any other responsibility in this world, other than to live holy lives to make the message believable and to preach the message and to give up whatever we need to give up of ourselves and our lives and all that we possess to that end. And when we say to you, give to the Christmas offering so we can send missionaries to the end of the world, what you do with that opportunity will tell you an awful lot about what your priority is. Well you say, "I'd like to do that but I've got this long list of stuff that I really need." What are we doing in this world other than being the means by which God gathers sinners to Himself?

That's the point He is making. Look, this is going to come on the whole world. We need to be ready to proclaim the gospel. That's what we live for. So, the Lord says, "These are the gifts I would like from you, vigilant anticipation, spiritual separation, evangelistic occupation," one more...this is critical...faithful continuation....faithful continuation.

Verse 36, this verse is loaded with truth and we'll just give it a brief look, it's truth we've covered on other occasions. "Keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that praying for the specific reason that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place and to stand before the Son of Man."

Let me make it real simple. The only people who will escape are believers. The only people who will stand before the Son of Man are believers. The rest are going to fall before Him. To stand before the Son of Man, what does that mean? That means to come into His court and to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." That means to come into His court and hear Him say, "Not guilty, perfectly righteous, go to heaven."

By the way, there's no illustration of this here, but there is a marvelous illustration of this in Matthew 25 and it's the judgment of the sheep and the goats. The sheep are the ones who stand before the Son of Man. The goats are the ones who do not. The sheep are the ones who know Him and He knows them. The goats are the ones who do not know Him nor does He know them. That separation in that judgment is described graphically in Matthew 25. Also, earlier in Matthew 25 you have a story about servants. Some of the servants are faithful and they stand before their master and are rewarded. And there is an unfaithful servant who does not stand and is cast into hell. And you also have a story in Matthew 25 about ten virgins, remember that? Five were ready, five were not. Five had the strength, the God-given grace, the power of true regeneration life, they had oil in their lamps and when the bridegroom came, they went into the wedding. There were five who were superficially committed but had no real life, no oil, they were shut out.

So the Lord illustrated this exhortation with three stories of a sheep and goat judgment, of servants, and of virgins. And He illustrated it on that same occasion, as Matthew tells us. But the final point is this, pray that you may have strength. Pray that you have true spiritual life. That's essentially what He's saying. This is essential. This is foundational. We are commanded to believe. We are commanded to continue in the faith. We are commanded to not turn back. We are commanded in that sense to come all the way to Christ, to embrace Him in a true saving faith that is the real thing, and then to continue in that faith. God actually securing us by means of that perseverance. We are called to a life of humble dependence on the Lord's strength and the Lord's power. We can always say, "I can say...you can say as a believer right now that I was saved by the power of the Lord and no strength of my own, and I am kept by the power of the Lord and no strength of my own." And I pray continually as I pray to be saved, I pray that God in His grace will give me the strength to persevere. We want to be the true believers and two promises are given to those who faithfully persevere. One, you will escape all these things about to take place.

Now that's a powerful, powerful statement. You are to escape all these things that are about to take place. What do you mean "all these things"? Everything that's been said since verse 24, everything that's associated with the end. Escape, ekpheugo, from which we get fugitive, ek intensifies, pheugo means to flee, to take flight. When you put an ek on the front of it, it intensifies it, it means to flee out from, to flee out of. If we're true believers then we will escape all these things that are about to come. To those who are living during the time of the Tribulation, this would mean they would escape, of course, final judgment. To those living in this age right now, this may well mean we will escape the future judgements in the time of the Tribulation and thus can be a verse related to a pre-tribulational Rapture. The only way you can escape these things is not to be here, right? Cause it's going to be everywhere. The judgments will be everywhere. How could you escape them if you were here?

So, to those living in the last generation, they will escape the final judgments of the wrath of God on unbelievers. To those of us living in this age, this could well be a promise that we will escape everything that is to come, consistent with us being taken to glory before these things begin. Well the

first promise is escape. The second promise is that when we've been taken out of here and we're brought before the Lord, we will stand. We will stand.

Now if I look at my own life, I would say, "Look, if you ever bring me into the presence of holy God and the presence of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ, I don't think I could survive." Isaiah couldn't, "O wretched man," like Paul, "I'm a man of unclean lips. Woe is me." Imagine going into the presence of the Lord and being able to stand, to survive it means, to stand as righteous, acceptable, made worthy by the imputed righteousness of Christ purchased at the cross. Only God could do that. That's why Jude closes his little epistle, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless." Wow, so for those who live in anticipation of the return of Christ, we will...and our faith is real, and it's a continuing, persevering, enduring faith which gives evidence of its reality, we will escape, we will be taken out, brought to the Lord and we will stand blameless because of Christ.

So what is it that the Lord would want from us? Vigilance, living all the time as if He could come in the next moment. That has a powerful effect on how we live. Holiness, living lives of virtue separated from the sinful indulgences from the world around us so that when He comes we're not caught in some overbearing iniquity. Living lives of proclamation of the gospel faithfully, so to the very end we are proclaiming the glories of the gospel of Christ that sinners might escape judgment. And persevering in faithfulness, demonstrating a true saving faith. And Jesus said in Luke 12, "If you confess Me before me, I will confess you before My Father who is in heaven." If you're faithful in your profession of Me here, enduring in your devotion to Me, you will stand in My presence.

I wasn't there, neither were you the first time Jesus came. I wasn't there. Oh the story's been told many, many times, I've heard the story many times, I've talked about the story, taught about it, preached about it, written several books about it, I understand the story but I wasn't there...wasn't there. But I will be there next time He comes. If I've already died, I'll come with Him. If I'm here, I'll be taken. I won't miss that one. I wasn't there the first time to give Him anything. But I will be there the next time either when I leave this world, or when He comes to take me to be with Him. And I want to be able to give Him gifts them. It's the only opportunity I'll have and these are the things He asks of me, and of you.

Father, we thank You again for the wonderful truth of Your Second Coming. We can't even think of the manger in Bethlehem and the baby without thinking about the King, the Lord of glory, the one who will come as judge, they are one and the same. There's no point in knowing only the beginning of the story and not the end of it, the end is everything. We thank You, Lord, that You've told us not only the beginning with regard to the story of Jesus, but the end. Bound up in this is our end also. Prepare souls even now, Lord, for Your return. Prepare us all to give you the gifts that You deserve when You come.

And I pray, Lord, that for those who do not know Christ, do not know salvation, for whom this will come like a thief in the night as the flood came upon the generation of Noah, or as the fire and brimstone came upon the generation of Lot, and took them all away forever, that they might even now be rescued before this judgment comes. Save people from indifference and from debauchery as if You would not come and they had no accountability. Help them, Lord, to come to the only refuge, the only ark of safety, the only place where they can come and escape even to the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again for our salvation. Bring many sinners to Christ, we pray, for Your glory. Amen.

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