

Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign

Luke 17:20-37; 21:5-36

Intro: We'll be talking about two sections of Luke that talk about the same thing:

^{ESV} **Luke 21:7** And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

- >> *When?*
- >> *When will the end of time be?*
- >> *When will the Messiah return?*
- >> *When will the kingdom come?*
- >> *When will there be divine, eternal judgment?*

People have been asking for millennia ... and not just Christians/religious.

Jesus' answer to when might surprise you.

- He doesn't say that there'll be clear signs that tell us when to do a last minute "straighten up," a last minute "get right".
- But he also doesn't say that there won't be any signs at all.
- His answer is actually that there are signs everywhere/all the time. (song ref.)

Illustration: Rocky Mountain Trucker Signs--non-typical/attention grabbing

- *Truckers, are your brakes cool? Steep grade ahead.*
- *Truckers, you're not down yet!*
- *Truckers, tap your brakes here!*
- *Truckers, don't be fooled - steep curves ahead.*

Goal: Keep the warning signs from becoming "white noise" and easily ignored.

What happens if the warning signs become white noise?

The Nature of the Coming Kingdom (Luke 17)

1. It is NOW and NOT YET

"... we say that a lot around here"

NOW (v 20-21)

- Not coming with signs (20) ? - Really? Yes and No
- Not coming as a physical entity (21) (not touchable/visible per se)
- Not coming as military or political entity (cf Jn 18:36)
- It is already "in your midst" (21) (is spiritual/everywhere)

"Jesus brought the new kingdom to earth in his first coming."

NOT YET (v 22)

- *"the days will come" -- tells us that whatever else he'll say, this is something future*
- spends the rest of the chapter describing the "not yet"

2. It will be VISIBLE and UNMISTAKABLE (v. 23-24)

- He's concerned about those who lead his disciples astray.
- You won't have to go see it. You won't have to be told about it. It won't be private. It won't be secretive.
- It'll be like lightning. Visible, public, unmistakable, fills the whole sky ...

"There's nothing of a secret rapture here."

NASB **1 Thessalonians 4:16** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a **shout, with the voice of the archangel** and **with the trumpet** of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

3. It will be SUDDEN and UNEXPECTED (26-33)

Lightning striking is also **SUDDEN / instantaneous**. (Can't dodge it.)
You'll know once it's happened, but you won't know it's coming right before it does.

Noah (vs. 26-30)

- All were simply going about their business - *eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building* (v. 20). [All fine things ... ignoring the warning of judgment.]
- They didn't believe Noah's preaching about coming judgment.
- Horrible irony for them to be *buying this land* or *selling this garment* that day.

Lot's Wife (v. 32, Gen. 19)

- God chose to spare Abram and his family, which included his nephew Lot and his family.
- God told them to leave because destruction was coming on the whole city.
- They were to head out for the wilderness in view of going to the promised land.
- But God told them, as they go out and leave "sin city," *don't look back!*
- Lot's wife looked back, and she was immediately turned into a chunk of salt
- "Looking back" reflected her mixed emotions about what she was leaving behind and what was being destroyed.
 - *She knew enough to leave, but not enough to be saved.*
 - *Or she had enough faith to flee, but not the kind of faith that trusts the judge.*
 - *She apparently had some resentment about leaving stuff behind.*
 - *It doesn't matter what she was looking back to - it matters only that she looked back.*
- Think of what Hebrews says of Abraham, where he proved to be the exact opposite of Lot's wife - not only when he first left his hometown of Ur, but when he had to leave Sodom

Hebrews 11:8-10 *By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

- No surprise then that **Jesus said**: “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and **looking back**, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:62).

“Brothers and sisters do not look back!”

4. It will be PERSONAL and UNIVERSAL (vs. 34-37)

PERSONAL--Two people at the same place – one is taken, the other is left

- *I’d suggest that the one taken is not taken in a rapture up to heaven, but taken in judgment. Jesus hasn’t been talking, and doesn’t go on to talk, about a rapture here. So his hearers would have most likely understood the one taken as the one under judgment. [See Discussion*
- **Regardless of which it is** – whether those taken away are taken away to glory or judgment, **this much is obvious: when judgment comes, it will be personal.**

What is stressed in vs. 37 is that his coming will be UNIVERSAL

- The disciples ask Jesus, “where [will all this stuff happen]?”
- Jesus’ answer is “where the dead body is, there vultures will be also.”-- it almost seems like the answer to a different question.
- Jesus doesn’t exactly answer their question about “where?”, because this will be everywhere.

The Warning Signs of the Coming Kingdom (Luke 21)

1. NATURAL DISASTERS: Earthquakes, Plagues, Famines (10-11) (... and also wars)

2. PERSECUTION (12-19)

What does v 18 mean, that “not one hair on their heads will perish”?

3. DESTRUCTION of the TEMPLE (20-24) (ref. vs 5-9)

- Foreshadowing the destruction of the Temple (by the Romans in AD 70)
- Jesus is talking about soon-coming judgment when teaching the disciples in Luke 21.
- “this generation will not pass away until you see these things” (vs. 32)

4. GROWING DISMAY (25-26)

Then Jesus will come in power and glory (27)

- *When, right after these signs? Are vs.10-26 describing a time of intensified earthquakes, more frequent famines, more horrible wars that signal that Jesus’ return is very, very near? **NO**.* Most of us have been taught that, many of us believe that, but it’s not anywhere here.
- Remember, earthquakes, famines, plagues, and wars were happening in Jesus’ day and all the way through to our own day.

- “the end does not immediately follow” (Ref. 21:9)

“Jesus’ point is actually the opposite of how many of us take it.”

He’s not saying that wars, earthquakes, plagues, or famines are the signs of the end. He’s actually saying that they *aren’t* signs of the end. They are signs, for sure; but *they are signs of the time*. But they have been signs since Jesus first taught all this.

- “birth-pangs” analogy (Matt 24)-- We don’t know how long this labor is.
- See 21:8 - don’t be misled by those who say “the time is near.”

Beware of those who say “this has happened, this has happened, and this has happened, therefore his return is right around the corner.”

- Jesus was describing the time between his 1st coming and his 2nd coming.
- These “signs” aren’t proof that the end is here. They are proof that God hasn’t come in judgment yet
- But they are tremors of what’s to come. They are road signs.

Jesus doesn’t want you to figure out when he’ll be coming. You can’t.

- On the one hand we’re to live like it will be **1,000 yrs from now**.
- On the other hand, we’re to live like it it’ll be **tonight**.

The Implications for Christ’s Followers (Luke 21)

1. Be Ready - know who’s side you’re on (repent and believe the Gospel) --Psalm 46

2. Be Happy and Expectant - not fearful

- Matt 24 calls the earthquakes, wars, famines, etc. the birth pangs before the final birth of Christ’s rule. To some these birth pangs are tremors of coming judgment, to others they are the glorious reminder that something wonderful is about to born.
- Let the birth pangs be a reminder to be faithful, to persevere, to be bold, to not hold tightly to things, but also to look to our heavenly home and coming redemption; to look ahead with confidence and joy.

3. Be WATCHFUL and THOUGHTFUL (vs. 29-32)

Don’t get distracted (v.34)

Be careful of either extreme:

- Obsessing about end-times, and making this your life's study.
- Ignoring the second coming, thinking that you'll probably just die like everyone else.

4. Be PRAYERFUL (v. 36)

5. Be BOLD and CONFIDENT (vs. 13-18)

Conclusion

You may disagree with some (or a lot) with what I've said. We may have different views of how all this will play out. That's okay – these are things that good Christians can and do disagree on.

“... this is not something we think Christians should divide over.”

So I hope and pray that you're focus right now is not your view versus my view.

Jesus is clear about these things and every Christian should be able to agree with these:

- He is coming back
- Know what side you're on
- Live like he's coming back
- Don't cling to stuff as if it was most important or as if you could take it with you.
- Don't look back like Lot's wife did (v. 17:32)
- Be ready
- You don't know the time or the hour.
- Be busy in the meantime
- Be bold, be confident, be a witness ...even if persecution is inevitable
- And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines
 - Don't be surprised – the end is not yet
 - Don't be afraid ...for they remind us of the day of the Lord, ... our redemption.
 - But do be mindful that they are the birth pangs of the coming kingdom. They should keep us from thinking he'll never come back. They should remind us that “he is storing up wrath for the day of judgment” (Rom 2:5).

These clear things should be our focus, not whether we call ourselves *pre-* or *mid-* or *post-* or *a-*, *not* whether I disagree with your favorite novel or what your parents taught you.

Next Week's Text:

Luke 18:1-14

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Luke 17:20-37; 21:5-36

Study Helps and Application

We'll start with discussions on the implications for Christ's followers that Ryan ended with:

Discussion 1: Be Ready. Jesus' warnings are to prepare his people. We are to be prepared for difficult times ahead including natural disasters, persecution, widespread "fear and foreboding."

– *How do we prepare for natural disasters?*

[We can feel helpless in the face of natural disasters, and in some ways we are. How do we prepare our hearts for these times? Are these not the times when people question God's character or power? --Study God's character and nature...]

– *How do we prepare for persecution?*

[Yes, we can prepare our hearts as in the previous question. How should this affect our gospel message?--Tell the Truth... warn people and tell them to count the cost... Remember, "What you win them with is what you win them to." Trials, tribulations, temptations, and persecutions await God's children and should not come as a surprise.]

Discussion 2: Be Happy and Expectant. It is helpful to focus on the victory that we know is coming. **Read and discuss this "not yet" text:**

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 15:51** Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[Here we see that our sanctification will be brought to completion in an instant (including our bodies) at Christ's return. Note again how visible/unmistakable this event is. Note the victorious language. Finally, note the exhortation: "Therefore... be ..."]

Discussion 3: Be Watchful and Thoughtful.

Jesus began his response with a warning about false prophets and teachers (v. 8) saying "I am he" or "the time is at hand", and it is emphasized in Matthew's record (vv. 24:4-5, 11, 23-26).

- *How do we recognize false prophets and teachers?*

[A call for discernment--We must be so familiar with the truth (sound doctrine) that counterfeit teachings can't fool us. We must become accustomed to discerning teachers and movements by the fruits of the Holy Spirit. As for predictive prophesy there is clear guidance: Deut 18:21-22 (100% accuracy!)]

- *Discuss the dangers of the two end-times extremes Ryan cautioned us about.*

[obsessing over end times is a time and energy drain and is often characterized by ever-increasing speculation--house of cards eschatology; ignoring eschatology can lead us to ignore the urgency of the Gospel, or "...your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap." (v. 34) ... *can you think of more?...*]

Discussion 4: Be Prayerful.

^{ESV} **Luke 21:36** But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

- **Read and discuss the context and nature of *this* prayer (v. 36).**

[It is a call to remain alert and not be presumptuous about God's provision. We are called to pray for this strength... *see the next discussion*]

Discussion 5: Be Bold and Confident. It is one thing to call for endurance and boldness in the midst of potentially discouraging signs; it is another for us to do it.

- *Where does the power to endure and be bold come from?*

[This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Compare Peter before and after Pentecost... from "I don't know the man." (denials) to: "But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words..." (Acts 2:14)

We are to believe (trust/have faith) in the power of the Holy Spirit to illuminate us to the truths of Gods Word, transform us, and in extreme cases like those in Luke 21:10-14, give us the very words to say. It is no coincidence that we are discussing prayerfulness and boldness together here...]

- *Read and discuss some confidence building verses (add your own!)*

^{ESV} **John 16:33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 15:51-58** (quoted in discussion 3)

Discussion 6: Disagreement.

Eschatology (*study of last things*) is in some ways an “open hand” theological issue and our goal here is not to get everyone in total agreement. Fine theologians (not to mention DSC elders) have disagreement on last things and continue to enjoy fellowship.

It is very likely that you will have some disagreement among you over some of the interpretations Ryan presented during the sermon. Emphasize these things: (1) Sound theologians do and have disagreed on these issues for centuries; (2) DSC leadership firmly believes these are not issues Christians should divide over--*beware of making your view a litmus test of orthodoxy.*

[Leaders: You may find some emotionally charged resistance here because this may be a favorite hobby-horse doctrine for some. Our goal here is two-fold (1) agreement on the clear elements revealed; (2) respect for diverse *scripturally grounded* views.]

- *Can We Agree on These Things?*

[We can feel helpless in the face of natural disasters, and in some ways we are. How do we prepare our hearts for these times? Are these not the times when people question God’s character or power? --Study God’s character and nature...]

- He is coming back.
- It is important to know what side you’re on.
- We should live like he’s coming back any moment (holiness/gospel urgency).
- We should live like he’s coming back in the distant future (planning, education, ...).
- We shouldn’t cling to stuff.
- We shouldn’t look back like Lot’s wife did.
- We need to be ready.
- We don’t know the time or the hour (and aren’t supposed to).
- We should be busy in the meantime. (Great Commission!)
- We should be bold and confident witnesses and ambassadors.
- Persecution is inevitable--don’t be surprised/dismayed.
- And when we hear of wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines
 - Don’t be surprised – the end is not yet
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- *But what about... the rapture... the one taken/left ...?*

These are areas where there can and will be disagreement among Christians committed to the Bible as the guide of our faith and practice. Rather than dictate a view, we will encourage you to do your homework to come up with an understanding they you can hold with a clear mind and conscience.

- *Why do you believe what you believe about _____? [rapture, millennium,...]*

[Good follow ups: "Is it the only view you've ever heard?" or "... "It's what pastor so-and-so always taught."]

- *Have you studied/considered other views?*

[Important: We are interested particularly in views held historically by proven and respected theologians. *Beware of novelty.* "Studying another view" does not mean reading a hatchet job by one of its opponents.]

Optional --Leaders discern if your group would be edified by this

- *... but I've never heard that about the "one taken" ...?*

[This is not a new or novel view. There may be no disagreement on this topic, but this still serves as a good example of how committed Bible believers can differ on the meaning. The goal here is not to convince you one way, it is to get you to think biblically, and to foster respect for other biblically grounded views. Can each side respect the other's view within your CG?]

- ✓ *"one taken" is caught up (raptured) to God in deliverance*

- *can appeal to Noah and Lot as both having been taken out of the way of judgment.*

- ✓ *"one taken" is taken unto judgment*

- *can appeal to Jesus' "wheat and tares" parable and close-of-the-age self-interpretation (Matt 13:24-30 explained in vv. 36-43) where the tares are gathered first and burned, and then the wheat gathered*
- *can appeal to "where" (v. 37) as "where are they taken" and the answer being "where the vultures gather" (obscure, but doesn't sound like a "happy place")*

[Even the "where" in v. 37 can be taken several ways: "where will they be taken?" Or "where will they be left?" Or "where will all these things occur? (broader context in view)]

Discussion 7: Already and Not Yet.

- ***What are the implications of the Kingdom of God being “in our midst” (already)?***

[What does that make Jesus? (Reigning King or helpless hand-wringing observer/cheerleader?) What does that make you? (Child of the King or master of your own domain...)]

- ***Read and discuss the already and not yet for us as believers here:***

^{ESV} **1 John 3:2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

[1 John 3 gives some *already* “we are God's children now” and some *not yet*. “And everyone who thus hopes in him ...” applies this truth to our sanctification*.]

[**The Language of the Faith: Sanctification* is the process of becoming holy/being transformed by God’s Holy Spirit. It is distinct from *justification* which is our being declared righteous due to Christ’s substitutionary atonement (2 Cor. 5:21)]

Memory Verse

^{ESV} **2 Peter 3:11** Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness

Additional Resources

- *God’s Big Picture-Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* by Vaughan Roberts
- *An Evening of Eschatology* discussion with John Piper, Doug Wilson, Sam Storms, and Jim Hamilton.
www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByDate/2009/4262_An_Evening_of_Eschatology
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Discussion 3: Be Watchful and Thoughtful.

- *How do we recognize false prophets and teachers?*
- *Discuss the dangers of the two end-times extremes Ryan cautioned us about.*

Discussion 4: Be Prayerful. (Luke 21:36)

- **Read and discuss the context and nature of *this* prayer.**

Discussion 5: Be Bold and Confident. It is one thing to call for endurance and boldness in the midst of potentially discouraging signs; it is another for us to do it.

- *Where does the power to endure and be bold come from?*
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- *But what about... the rapture... the one taken/left ...?*
 - *Why do you believe what you believe about _____? [rapture, millennium,...]*
 - *Have you studied/considered other views?*
 - *(optional) ... but I've never heard that about the "one taken" ...?*

Discussion 7: Already and Not Yet. (As time permits...)

- *What are the implications of the Kingdom of God being "in our midst" (already)?*
- *Read and discuss the already and not yet for us as believers here: 1 John 3:2-3*

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