

Caleb Evans (2)

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[0:00] Now, when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.!

So, the readings appointed for this morning, for this first Sunday of Advent, are the kind of readings that cause the preacher to look at them and say, I really have to preach on one of these. Help me, Jesus.

You know, prophecy is a hard thing to preach about. Prophecy about the end times. Prophecy is even harder to preach about. You end up trying to sort out what applies to when and what these symbols and those images mean.

And you just hope that you don't get it wrong or end up with a confusing mess of a sermon. Also, the end times is kind of a, and our positions on them, are kind of a controversial issue in American Christianity, I guess I would say.

[1:27] I think part of the trouble is that when we talk about the end times, it's that in recent decades, American evangelical teaching on the matter has often, in my opinion, been confused or unclear.

Or, in my opinion, even sometimes outright wrong. I grew up in the era of the left-behind craze.

Now, everyone was talking about this kind of stuff, but I think that the emphasis in these conversations and the teaching around it was often unbalanced.

The emphasis on being left behind shifted the balance on how we think about the second coming of Christ. It ended up giving higher priority to the fearful aspect of the end times over the good news of Christ's return.

And at its worst, people also ended up thinking less about God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven, and started thinking more in terms of being beamed up.

Now, all that being said, if you're a fan of the left-behind books, please don't be upset with me. It's okay to disagree with me on this. I'm not telling you to go home and burn all your left-behind books, so no worries on that front.

[2:47] I do think in Scripture, even in passages about the second coming of Christ and all that that involves, the emphasis there isn't on Christians getting carried off, but on God's kingdom coming to earth.

So that's going to be my focus this morning. Now, the particular passage that I'm preaching on this morning in Luke 21 is one that has baffled some of the greatest Bible scholars for centuries.

So you can imagine then that I was tempted to try to preach on an easier passage, but even if I wanted to, I couldn't find one this week. And the thing that really makes what Jesus is talking about in the wider passage so tricky is that Jesus is talking about two separate things, and it's difficult to untangle the two.

On the one hand, Jesus is predicting that Jerusalem will be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, which did happen, which did happen, by the way. But Jesus is also talking about his second coming.

Now, the link, as best we can tell, is that Jesus is using the judgment that will come on those who rejected Christ when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

[4:04] He's comparing that judgment with the broader judgment of sin that will come when Jesus returns. Now, I'm not going to preach on everything that we read in Luke this morning, because that would take more than one sermon, especially because the last half of our passage, when we get into the parable about the fig tree, is quite tangled.

I'm going to focus on the first half of our passage, which is, of course, not very long, but I think that there's plenty to unpack there. You guys are making this so much easier for me.

Thank you. Before we jump into the text, I want to take kind of an informal poll. You don't have to answer out loud unless you really want to.

But what is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about the second coming of Christ? What does that bring to mind for you? And keep that in mind, and let's look at our text with the understanding that it is talking specifically about the second coming of Christ.

So starting in verse 25. So these verses are a description of what will happen before the coming of Christ.

[5:35] The second coming of Christ. Now I realize that these verses look perplexing. They look maybe a little gloom and doom.

We're talking about signs and sun and moon and stars, roaring of the sea and the waves. That's intense. Now in my studies in preparation for this particular sermon, I walked away with the impression that there are a few things going on here that we should take note of.

These signs could be talking about natural disasters, which is kind of an obvious reading of the text here. But I've also seen convincing arguments that political developments are also in view.

Now being an Anglican, I am more of a both and rather than an either or kind of person. So I think it's likely that there might be elements of both of these things going on in our text. Now whatever these signs may be, they will cause people to faint with fear, as the text says, and they will cause foreboding.

That sounds like a bummer. But what does Jesus have to say next? Verse 27. So what will happen next is that Jesus returns, will come in a cloud with power and great glory.

[7:13] He will return visibly for all to see as the rightful and the victorious king. And this will be obvious to everyone rather than puzzling, as the preceding signs were.

And then Jesus gives a word of encouragement. When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Isn't necessarily what we would have expected to come next, would we? People are perplexed and terrified. It's foreboding. It's likely that things in the world are genuinely frightening.

And these signs that Jesus is talking about are no joke. But Jesus is clear. Yes, the fear, the foreboding, the powers of the heavens shaking, those things, they will happen.

But that is not the main point that Jesus is impressing here. He's telling us. He's coming back. And if things in the world are looking perplexing, if people are fainting with fear, that means you should look with expectation, because that means that the coming of Jesus is near.

[8:28] That he is coming soon. That he is coming to dwell with us and claim us forever. Our redemption is near. That is an important thing to remember, brothers and sisters.

Fear, confusion, and darkness will do nothing to change the fact that Jesus is coming to save those who are waiting for him. Fear, confusion, and darkness will do nothing to change the fact that Jesus is coming to save those who are waiting for him.

Fear, confusion, and fear, And keep in mind, the story doesn't end with a beam-me-up scenario in which we're all carried away to heaven forever. It ends, does it not, the biblical story, with the dead being raised and heaven coming to earth.

It's what we read in the book of Revelation as we read about how the story ends.

As we think about our redemption drawing near, I want us to think about what we read in Revelation 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

[9:37] And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And we're told that the signs that will come before Jesus comes, returns, will be the sign that our redemption is near.

This is what we're talking about. This is what the coming of Christ is going to usher in. The dead will be raised, everyone will be judged, then we will have new heavens and a new earth, where all who

have found salvation in Jesus will live with God in perfect joy and intimacy forever, in raised and glorified bodies that will never die.

When Jesus says our redemption is near, that is what he's talking about. As great as going to heaven is, and it is a really great thing, it is not the end of the story.

[11:03] The end of the story is heaven coming to earth. I'm about to get really scholarly here, and quote Mia's Jesus Storybook Bible, because I think it gives a great picture of what John saw in Revelation that we just looked at.

One day John knew heaven would come down and mend God's broken world and make it our true, perfect home once again. And he knew in some mysterious way that would be hard to explain that everything was going to be more wonderful for once having been so sad.

And he knew then that the ending of the story was going to be so great that it would make all the sadness and the tears and everything seem like just a shadow that is chased away by the morning sun.

So what do we do? In the meantime, as we watch for signs of Christ's coming and we wait for him, do we just sit around passively?

I would argue that the coming of Christ, his final victory over death and the new earth that he will bring in, all of that compels us not to just sit and wait.

[12:27] I like what Tim Keller says. And I quote, In Romans 2:16, Paul says that Christ's return to judge the earth was part of his gospel. And if you read Psalm 96:10, you will know why.

The earth will be renewed and even the trees will be singing for joy. And if the trees will be able to dance and sing under the cosmos' renewing power of his kingship, what will we be able to do?

When we realize that Jesus is going to someday destroy hunger, disease, poverty, injustice, and death itself, it makes Christianity what C.S. Lewis called a fighting religion.

When we are confronted with a city slum or a cancer ward. This full version of the gospel reminds us that God created both the material and the spiritual and is going to redeem both the material and the spiritual.

So what Keller is saying here is that the full gospel tells us that we are waiting through Jesus to come and renew this broken world and that we're called to live in the light of his kingdom now even before he comes.

[13:41] That means that ours is a fighting religion as Keller and Lewis rightly put it. Not the kind of fighting religion that hurts people or uses force to accomplish our aims.

A different kind of fighting religion. The kind of fighting religion that seeks out those who are lost and do not know the Lord, those who are in bondage, and fights against the evil one who holds them in bondage by proclaiming the gospel and sharing the love of Jesus.

The kind of fighting religion that seeks out those who are hurting and fights against the things that are hurting them. Fighting in the name of Jesus.

We are called by the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are lost, to love those who are hurting and broken, and to live in the light of the kingdom that is one day going to come on earth as it is in heaven.

We human beings do have a tendency, though, to think of the future as something that is in our hands.

[14:54] So we can't lose sight of the fact that it is Jesus who brings the kingdom. We're tempted to think that we can bring in heaven on earth, but so much of what we call human progress in our culture isn't progress at all.

Morally and spiritually, human beings are just as broken as we have ever been. And that often means that our so-called progress shows itself in our ability to develop more efficient ways of hurting, exploiting, or killing each other.

I'm not pointing out all of this to be a pessimist, not at all, but to make sure we understand that Jesus Christ is our only hope.

We've all sinned, and we've all made a mess of this world that we live in, and we keep doing it. But the gospel addresses both of those messes, doesn't it?

It addresses the fact that I am a sinner, that I need to turn to Jesus and believe the gospel, to trust in Him alone for my salvation, because salvation in Christ and His death and resurrection is the only way to eternal life.

[16:09] So, on the personal, individual note, in the gospel, we find forgiveness of our sins, and we find the promise that those who believe in Christ will have eternal life. But the gospel also addresses the fact that the world that we're living in is a mess, but it promises us that it will not always be that way.

The amazing thing is not only that it won't always be that way, but that even now, God allows us and empowers us by His Spirit to take part in the work that He is doing in the world. even now. We actually get to take part in God's mission in this world to set the captives free and to heal the broken. Isn't that awesome?

So keep going. Don't be afraid. Don't be perplexed. Don't be overwhelmed with foreboding. Because Jesus is coming again. That is literally the gospel truth. When things are at their most perplexing, when things are at their darkest, even then, we can look up because our redemption is near.

[17:36] Come, Lord Jesus. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ■■a. ...