

Signs Of The End - How It Ends

Luke 21:5-36

As we again open this portion of scripture that we'll study today where the Lord Jesus tells us about the many signs of the soon coming "end of days", we know from attending our local congregations that not all churches hold to the same beliefs as to how all these events will take place.

And it occurs to me that perhaps I should take a brief moment and mention my own personal background of learning concerning some of the doctrines that are found within these scriptures.

As a child in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, my church experience began as most others in that area. Pentecostal Churches were by far the most attended churches. And along with my mother, we most often attended the Pentecostal services.

Along my journey since, I have attended, Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches, eventually settling into and Pastoring Presbyterian Churches.

Why am I mentioning this as we begin this week's study of these blessed scriptures given here in Luke chapter 21. It is to say that from attending these other churches, I have gained a more diverse understanding of these scriptures than I would have experienced had I simply sat under one denominationally influenced set of doctrines. And may I say strongly that I count that a good thing, a very good thing.

Probably the one doctrine that I count as most influential within my beliefs is the Doctrine of the "Total Sovereignty of God", a strong and committed belief that God truly is Sovereign in every aspect of His being, in His Holiness, His Righteousness, His Omnipotence, His Omniscience, His Love, His Divine Plan and Purpose for mankind, and on and on. In every attribute of His being, I am convinced that our God is truly Sovereign.

And why do I love the understanding about the "Total Sovereignty of God" so much? Perhaps it's simply because it gives me great comfort to realize and accept that I myself am not in sovereign control over all the matters of this life, that all my own personal beliefs and behaviors, though they be important, are

still subject to and contingent upon the "Sovereignty of God". And I am completely satisfied with that subservience.

So then again, how does that fit with the understanding that I, that we all should have concerning these precious scriptures that we'll study today? It is this . . . throughout all the many denominational teachings regarding this mystery of the "End of Days" that our Lord is teaching about in this passage, there are myriads of personal beliefs, many of them carefully crafted by the various denominational church leaders to meet the desires of the people who attend their churches.

And yes, the understandings that I will share with you from my own experience with these words will most likely be different from your own. And though I cannot explain to you why I believe that such variation in beliefs is still OK with our Lord, I accept that it is.

And how can that be? Perhaps the reason is as simple as the manner in which children within a family respond differently to their father's instructions. For myself, I beseech the Lord to guide my thoughts and my beliefs and to keep me from "doing harm or injustice" to His infallible truth. And with that, I confidently trust Him to keep me within the boundaries of His precious Will for my understanding.

And I would ask you to do the same as you examine these scriptures. And especially as you join with me in searching for the proper understanding of them.

So then, be all of that as it may, listen as I read this portion of scripture given to us here in Luke chapter 21, beginning in verse 5.

⁵ . . . while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he (the Lord Jesus) said, ⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." 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?" ⁸ And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

²⁰ "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹ And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of

the whole earth. 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." (Luke 21:5-36)

You will recall that as we began our most recent study of these words of the Lord Jesus, we said that these events are intentionally shrouded within a mystery, a mystery whose meaning is hidden from the masses, but is being revealed to us, God's beloved children.

And while yes, it will be needful to examine many of the details of those events, we do always want to keep our focus on the first and most important part of this mystery, and that is that the "End of Days" is all about the return of Christ. Our beloved Savior and Lord is coming back to earth to complete the redemption of His people, you and me, the redemption that He began on the cross where he provided mercy and grace to all who would receive Him as Savior and Lord.

And we do also want to remember that this mystery is about Christ bringing with Him what He calls "His recompense", His final and complete justice to all the many people of this earth, many of whom have arrogantly refused to receive His provision of mercy and grace. Justice first beginning with satan and his rebellious angels, and then justice to a corrupt and perverse people.

And then, praise be to God, after He has accomplished all of those things, He will establish His never-ending righteous kingdom upon a new, incorruptible heaven and earth.

But, as we said earlier, these words of Jesus do give us an ominous warning that the manner in which the many events of the last days will take place will not be at all pleasant, not for any of us, believers and unbelievers alike. Listen to these words of the Lord Jesus given in Mark chapter 13,

¹⁹ For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. ²⁰ And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. (Mark 13:19-20)

These great and terrible events lay yet ahead of us. And we need to receive this warning and deal with their coming with stern solemn resolve, and with

complete surrender to Christ, else we are in danger of finding ourselves among those upon whom God will pour out His great and terrible wrath.

But again, as we search through these prophecies and attempt to understand their meaning, we find that the mystery shrouds our understanding. And even as we study the explanations given by the most learned of bible teachers, we find that there is also very little agreement even among them in their interpretations of these prophecies. Because most often those teachers are simply repeating the things they have learned over time through their particular denominational teachings.

And therein also is another potential pitfall. Because we are cautioned from these scriptures to never make or receive a private interpretation of these prophecies. We are told in 2 Peter 1:20-21,

²⁰ Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ²¹ For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as *they were* moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

God's messengers who wrote these scriptures were men who were especially selected and equipped by God, men who were willing to allow God to speak through them and to offer none of themselves within the wording of these scriptures.

A question . . . can God do the same thing today with men of our modern time? Yes, He can, but He does not give any "new" words of prophecy. All that we need and all that will ever be given are contained within this Book.

Men of today need only to surrender themselves to read and to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, and to be willing to only give forth the words that God desires for them to give at the moment. And in their surrender, there will be no confusion or disagreement.

But unfortunately, we live within a corrupt and perverse generation and for that reason these events surrounding the "End of Days" remain shrouded within a great mystery.

And again, our theologians, though they be earnest in their studies, continue to form ideas and theories that are not at all in agreement with each other.

And in their studies of this mystery of the second coming of Christ, they have formed a whole segment of theology unto itself and they have named it "Eschatology".

And their pursuits seem most to center around the very same questions that intrigued the disciples, "how and when these events will take place".

Will these events perhaps begin in a subtle manner, even over many centuries, with some of them having already taken place, perhaps beginning just after the death of Christ on the cross.

Some bible scholars believe that several of these events that are described here took place in the days that the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. And that is probably a good assumption. Verse 6 of our scripture passage surely seems to speak about those events when it speaks about "there not being one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" because that is exactly what took place in Jerusalem in 70 AD. But from other of these words, we also know that many of these events are still to take place at a later date.

And with all their many differences of opinion, our theologians have unwittingly divided believers into several camps of belief about these things.

Most all of the doctrines, that have been developed, though they vary a great deal, have in some manner, to do with the "millennium", the 1,000 year reign of Christ and His saints described in Revelation 20:4-6.

The first and perhaps largest group of believers within the modern day church have adopted a belief in what has come to be called "Premillennialism", a doctrine that centers around the belief that before the millennium takes place, God's people will be "raptured", "caught away" into the clouds of heaven as Christ returns with His mighty hosts to finally and decisively defeat satan and his demonic armies.

And those who believe in that doctrine are themselves divided into three camps, all three agree, believing that yes, there will be a "rapture" of God's people, but differing as to exactly when that "rapture" will take place.

Some, and perhaps the majority, believe that the “rapture” will be the first major event that will take place, setting into motion the beginning days of the “great tribulation” spoken about in Matthew 24:21. There we are told,

²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. (Matthew 24:21)

Those who hold to that doctrine believe that at a special moment in time, known only to God, He will, in an instant, remove every believer from the earth, leaving only the unbelievers to wonder as to what has taken place.

Many books and movies have been written based on this belief, the most popular of which is the “Left Behind” series by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LeHaye. This particular doctrine is preached in a majority of the Baptist, Methodists and Pentecostal Churches.

Another variation of that belief holds that, yes the rapture will take place, but not at the beginning of the “great tribulation”, but during the middle part of it, or perhaps even at the very end of it, allowing many of the saints to experience great suffering and confusion.

The words of Matthew 24:24 give that ominous warning. Listen!

²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24)

If all the believers were raptured away at the beginning of the tribulation, how can this take place? Some would say that the elect spoken about here are new converts to Christ made during their suffering in the tribulation.

And perhaps that is true. But we must be warned! If we set our hopes on being raptured out before the crisis begins, we will be sorely confused if the tribulation begins to take place all around us and we are still here.

So then, whichever of these beliefs we hold to, we must be careful to hold them loosely, else we may be one of those “elect” spoken about here who are “led astray”.

There is also another camp of believers that hold to the doctrine that the “millennium”, the 1,000 year reign of Christ and His saints described in Revelation 20:4-6, is not an actual 1000 years, but is rather to be taken as a metaphorical

time period, a time that is actually already taking place even now, and perhaps even beginning back at the time of the ascension of Christ back into heaven. Those beliefs would include many within the Presbyterian denomination and are called Post-millennialism and Amillennialism.

And those doctrines also vary in that they introduce the possibility that the "great tribulation" will be the time spoken of in Revelation 20 when satan is released for a short time.

That doctrine states that we have, for a long time now, been living in an age in which satan and his demonic forces are actually bound and have only very limited access to us to bring us harm. But in the very last of days, during the great tribulation, satan's chains will be completely removed and he will be able to bring great suffering upon all people.

Join me as I read about that in Revelation chapter 20 beginning in verse 1.

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.

This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved

city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:1-10)

These are ominous, foreboding words. And many among us believe that some of these things are actually taking place right now or will soon begin.

And perhaps they are correct. Consider for a moment, could the “mark of the beast” perhaps be our submission to our government’s rule over us, with everyone required to have numbers such as our Social Security number?

That may sound like a real “stretch”, but consider . . . with the new mandates that are required under the new healthcare laws, beginning over these most recent years, all of us have been required to have some form of the government’s mandated healthcare, giving our government personal access to us and all our private records.

Folks, we really can’t get around the fact that these modern day events are sounding eerily similar to the events described here in these scriptures.

I don’t know which of these doctrines you have come to believe, “Premillennialism” or “Post-millennialism”, or “Amillennialism”, or which variation of either of them seems right to you. Perhaps you have even joined with that other group of people who glibly use the expression “pan-millennialist”, saying that they just believe that it will all “pan out” in the end.

Whatever path of belief you are led to follow, please do understand that this matter is very, very serious to God and He would desire your faith and trust in the truths that are given here in His word.

For me, I must say that some of each of these doctrines is being described within these words. And because of that, I cannot completely discount any of them. There are common threads that are laced throughout all of them, especially that there will surely come a time when Jesus will return to call the world as we know it to a final and complete close. And those events will be catastrophic beyond our imagination, like no others that have taken place or ever will take place.

It will be violent beyond our comprehension. And many of us may be required to go through a great deal of suffering.

And perhaps, in our next study, we will consider some of those days of suffering in greater detail, because we dare not be caught unawares when those days of horror begin to take place.

Folks, we can't know why God has chosen to allow His beloved saints to suffer, but He has. And He is not unkind or unrighteous for doing so. If He did not spare His own Beloved Son from suffering, why should He spare you and me, His adopted sons and daughters!

We can only know that most all of these events and their sufferings still do lie ahead for us, and for our children and for our grandchildren.

Our only hope rests in the confident belief that God truly is "good", "very good". And He is "Holy" beyond any form of holiness we could ever imagine. And knowing that to be true, we can trust Him with our bodies and our souls. And with that trust, we will simply await His coming, with great anticipation, because when it is all over, His great kingdom will finally be established and will be joyous beyond our imagination.

Let's close for today with these words from 2 Peter 3:10-15

¹⁰ . . . the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation. (2 Peter 3:10-15)

Pray with me!