

Jeremiah 33:14-16
 Psalm 25:1-9
 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
 Luke 21:25-31

Rebellion, Repentance and Redemption
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YOUR REDEMPTION IS DRAWING NEAR

In Advent we focus on the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. We turn our hearts from worldly pursuits and prepare for his coming. There is an air of anticipation as once again we open the prophetic words of Scripture. Jesus said to his disciples, *“Your redemption is drawing near”* (Luke 21:28). If you accept by faith the things Jesus said, then each passing day brings your redemption one day closer.

Jesus prepared the disciples for his second coming in the Olivet Discourse, versions of which are in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. How are we to interpret these prophecies of things to come?

How could anyone living in 700 B.C. guess how the prophecy, *“It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh ...”* (Joel 2:28-29) would be fulfilled seven centuries later? When was this prophecy in fact fulfilled, and which Jew finally saw that it was fulfilled, and used it in a sermon?

Men have learned that (1) fulfillment of prophecy may take a long time, and (2) prophecy tells *what* is coming, but usually does not reveal the details of *how* the prophecy will be fulfilled. With these things in mind, let us review some verses in the Olivet Discourse leading up to our lesson today.

Luke 21:8-11. *And he said, “Take heed 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. ⁹And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified; for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”*

¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”¹

- *“Take heed that you are not led astray”* (v.8). With Jesus away, his disciples would be tempted to lose faith in times of tribulation, just as you and I are tempted at such times to turn from God and grasp at straws.
- *“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”* (v.10). Since the days of Cain, sin has made men unable to live at peace with one another. The world never has changed in this respect.
- *“There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences”* (v.11). We have been unable to stop these things. Until the Last Day there will be earthquakes, and famines, and disease.

For example, a recent U. N. Food and Agriculture Organization report says the number of malnourished people in the world has been growing at the rate of 4.5 million per year. Yet the world produces enough food to feed every one, and the main problem with food in some countries is overeating.

- *“There will be terrors and great signs from heaven”* (v.11). When Jesus was born there was a wonderful sign from heaven. A bright star rose in the sky, drawing wise men in the east to Bethlehem. When Jesus returns, the signs will be different. They will warn of judgment, and many will be terrified.

Jesus went on in v.12-19 to describe how the disciples would be persecuted, hated, and betrayed, even by unbelieving family members. Then, in v.20-24, he spoke of *“great distress upon the earth and wrath”* and ended by saying Jerusalem would be *“trodden down by the Gentiles.”* Some who heard Jesus speak these words would live to see the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. When the Romans besieged Jerusalem, believers said, *“This must be the day Jesus spoke of.”* In the final days of our own age, believers who see the signs of his coming are going to say the same thing. Others won’t have a clue.

Luke 21:25-31 *“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in*

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees; ³⁰as soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

• “Your redemption is drawing near” (v.28). There are two main aspects of the passages we have read. First, there is the overwhelming hope of *redemption*. Men everywhere continue to hope for an end to evil and suffering and death. These things will end when Christ returns. All creation will be redeemed at his second coming. (See Romans 8:19-23, for example.) Jesus said to expect redemption: “*When these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*”

“*Look up and raise your heads,*” Jesus said (v.28). None of us is pure and sinless, yet he has told us to expect his second coming as men did his first, with great joy and anticipation. He will complete the work begun in every believer and restore finally in us the life God intended in the first place. This is our hope. And hope does not disappoint us. We have confidence in Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Second, there are stern warnings of judgment in terms of natural disasters. Jesus associated his coming with the *Day of the Lord* – a prophesied time of great tribulation when God will judge the world and destroy the evil powers now manifested. “*Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes*” (Joel 1:15). People will flee from God. See Rev 6:15-17, for example.

The *Day of the Lord* is never described as a time of tranquility, when men finally learn to live at peace with each other. It will be a time of fire and destruction. Just as all life once perished in a flood by the word of God, so *by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men* (2 Pet 3:7).

For many, the Day of the Lord will not bring redemption. “*Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light; as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?*” (Amos 5:18-20).

• “*So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near*” (v.31). There is a troubling issue in the two aspects of Christ’s return. If he came to redeem mankind and is coming again to finish this work, why will his second coming be accompanied by wrath and destruction and death for many? Is Jesus not able to redeem all of creation?

The answers to these questions are in the Bible. John 3:16-18 is perhaps the most familiar explanation of why Jesus came in the first place, and why some men are condemned. He came because *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.* Discuss the ways *judgment* and *condemnation* as well as *redemption* are used in these well-known verses. Is someone really *condemned* simply because he has heard this warning and yet refuses to believe in the name of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God? The answer is yes. Someone asks, “Is this just?”

But justice is not exactly the issue here. The issue is that all men – believers and nonbelievers alike – are part of the problem of evil. Pogo was right when he said, “We have seen the enemy, and he is us!” The Bible says, *Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Rom 5:12, 6:23). Jesus came to redeem men from sin. He came to make men sinless – reborn in his likeness.

This is why men are *condemned* if we fail to believe in him when given the opportunity. Men are not condemned for the sin of failing to believe. They are condemned because, failing to believe, they remain sinners. You cannot cleanse yourself from sin. “*You must be born anew,*” Jesus said (John 3:7). Jesus is coming. The time to believe in him is now – today!