

His Advent Will Be Sudden! Are You Ready?

Luke 21:5-38 (text)

15 December 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

It's Advent! – Advent of the year 2019!

What is Advent?

Well, *advent* means *coming*!

What coming?

Well, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world of human beings, two thousand years ago!

Of course, next Sunday (in both services) – and on Christmas Day – we will be remembering that mind-bending and history-changing event!

But what we want to focus on today, is *another* advent – the *second* Advent/Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, for, you see, that's what our text is all about!

And here's the question: Are you (am I) ready for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

You see, not-being-ready will be an eternal disaster!

Question: Will there be a second chance for those who are not ready at Christ's coming?

Will you be able to do what some students do – i.e. to ask for an extension when they're not ready to hand in their assignments on time!?

No! God's Word is clear on this!¹

If you're not ready, then you're not ready – that's it!

So, here's the vital question...

When will our Lord return? When is it the end of the world?

Well, that's the same question the disciples put to Jesus!

And He answered them!

Here is how it happened...

It's the end of day!

All day long Jesus has been teaching the crowd in the temple's outer court!

Now, as Jesus and His disciples are leaving the temple, one of them, stunned by the splendour and size of the temple – its huge blocks of marble, its gold cladding, the huge golden decorations of vines & grapes hanging from walls² – says, "**Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!**"³

How did Jesus respond?

¹ See for example Mat 25 – the whole chapter regarding the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and Judgement Day!

² For a good summary of Josephus' descriptions of the Herodian Temple, cf. cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004.

Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.922-927).

³ Cf. Mk 13:1 (parallel passage to our text in Luke 21), **And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"**

Well, He said as much as, “Do you admire these buildings?” “I tell you; these will become utter ruins!”⁴

Shocking!

My brother & sister, what the disciples just heard from Christ would have shocked them at least by the same measure that 9/11 (and the collapse of the Twin Towers) shocked the Americans! After all, Jesus was not talking about the destruction of just any building! No, He was talking about the destruction of the glorious *temple of God*!! Unbelievable!

How do the disciples now react to this shocking news?

Well, they ask the obvious question: “When?”

“Lord Jesus, You have just given us the incredible news that, of this magnificent temple, no stone will be left upon the other!” “So, please tell us *when* will this happen!”

My brother & sister, think with me: Is that *all* the disciples were asking? I mean, if all they were asking was about the time of the *temple’s destruction*, then our Lord’s answer would have been shorter. But that’s not all they asked!

You see, according to the witness of Matthew, the disciples asked for more! Indeed, they loaded their question, so that they did not just ask 1) when the *temple* would be destroyed, but also 2) when *Christ would return* – i.e. when *the end of the world* would be! And, in *their* minds, these two events would happen *at the same time*!

In a way, how could we blame them for thinking that way?

I mean, *for them*, if this glorious temple gets destroyed together with the city of Jerusalem, would it then not be the end of the world and the return of their Lord!?

So, according to Matthew, here’s their question: “Lord,

1) *tell us, when will these things* (this destruction of the temple & city) *be, and*

2) *what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” (Mt 24:3).⁵

See how, in their ignorance, the disciples asked a double question?

Well, because of their double question, Jesus now gives them a double answer!

Yes, His answer describes...

1) the *near future* – i.e. the temple’s destruction, but...

2) it also describes the further future – i.e. His second coming (at the end of the age)!

And you know what? The near-future destruction of the temple has many things in common with what will happen in the further future at Christ’s second coming! Yes, it’s almost as if these two events are mirroring (reflecting) one another!⁶

See why it is so difficult to fully understand & interpret our Lord’s answer!?

Well, in light of everything said so far, here are the three points of this sermon...

⁴ Mk 13:2 (parallel passage to our text in Luke 21), ***And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”***

⁵ Mt 24:3, ***As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”*** (Emphasis mine).

⁶ Like they would also mirror/reflect some of the disastrous events of the Old Testament, e.g. the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

- Near Future
- Further Future
- Ready

Near Future

My brother & sister, less than one generation (yes, less than 40 years) after our Lord had spoken the words of our text, Jerusalem and its glorious temple got destroyed by the Roman military under General Titus.

It was the year 70 A.D.

And more than one million Jews got slaughtered – with no regard for their age or gender! And just under one million got deported to other cities within the Roman Empire!

Of course, at the time of our text, the disciples did not yet know about the exact time and detail of this event. All they knew was what they had just heard from Jesus – i.e. that no stone of the temple would be left upon another!

So, now, because they have asked, Jesus tells them what would happen before the time of this destruction!

Firstly, there would come many false Messiahs who would say, “Come, follow me, for the time is now near when God will help us to get rid of these oppressing, pagan Romans!”

Well, this prediction did come true, for the ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, does tell us about several such pretend-Messiahs.⁷

In fact, it was these zealous pretenders and the revolts/uprisings they caused (especially in Galilee), which became the last straw which broke Rome’s patience with the whole Jewish nation!⁸

False Messiahs!

A second thing that would precede Jerusalem’s fall, would be (as vv.12-16 say) *the persecution of Christ’s followers*.

Christ said that the Jews would lead His followers to the synagogues where they would be charged, then brought before kings, and then flogged and imprisoned and/or even killed. And also *these* words of our Lord got fulfilled! Yes, the Apostle Paul himself, before He received Christ, took part in these persecutions! He describes how he oversaw the flogging of Christians and how he imprisoned them.⁹

⁷ Josephus describes such claims in *Jewish Wars* 6.5.2–3 §§285–88, 300–309. Here is just a small excerpt from these paragraphs: “A false prophet was the occasion of these peoples destruction: who had made a publick proclamation in the city, that very day, that “...*God commanded them to get up upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance.*” Now there was then a great number of false prophets, suborned by the tyrants, to impose on the people: who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God; and this was in order to keep them from deserting; and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. Now a man that is in adversity does easily comply with such promises. For when such a seducer makes him believe that he shall be delivered from those miseries which oppress him, then it is that the patient is full of hopes of such his deliverance.

3. Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself...”
<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-6.html>).

⁸ Cf. the comments and references made by Hendriksen (ibid:938) on Lk 21:24.

⁹ Cf. e.g. Acts 9:1-2, **But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.**

Also Acts 22:19, **And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.**

As Christ predicted, some Christians got even killed – so, e.g. Stephen,¹⁰ but also the Apostle James (brother of John). Yes, 26 years before Jerusalem’s destruction, James got executed by Herod Agrippa I.¹¹

Then, of course, after Christ had grabbed Paul on the way to Damascus, then Paul himself became a heartfelt follower of Jesus – which meant that even Paul received from the Jews forty lashes less one, and not just once, but five times!¹²

Then, about two-to-eight years before the destruction of Jerusalem, Paul got beheaded because of his faith in Christ!¹³ Around that same time, Peter too was executed for his faith – both men in Rome.

According to traditions and the Bible, eight of the Apostles died as Martyrs. At least two of the Apostles (Peter and Andrew) were crucified.¹⁴

So, many Christians would be persecuted – some betrayed by friends and even relatives! And this would happen because of Christ Himself! After all, it’s Christ Himself whom these persecutors disbelieve and despise! So, as Christ indicates in v.17, for every Christian that gets persecuted, it’s actually *Christ* who gets persecuted! Look, is that not why Christ said to the persecutor Saul, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*”¹⁵

¹⁰ Cf. Acts 7:54-8:3, **Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.** ⁵⁵ **But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.** ⁵⁶ **And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”** ⁵⁷ **But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.** ⁵⁸ **Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.** ⁵⁹ **And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”** ⁶⁰ **And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.**

8 And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Also Acts 22:20, **And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.**

¹¹ Cf. Acts 12:1-3, **About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.**

² **He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also...**

Also cf. https://amazingbibletimeline.com/blog/q6_apostles_die/ which says about James that “he was put to death by Herod Agrippa I shortly before the day of the Passover, in the year 44 or about 11 years after the death of Christ. From Acts 12: 1-2.”

¹² Cf. 2 Cor 11:24 **Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.**

¹³ “The exact details of St. Paul’s death are unknown, but tradition holds that he was beheaded in Rome and thus died as a martyr for his faith. His death was perhaps part of the executions of Christians ordered by the Roman emperor Nero following the great fire in the city in 64 CE. It is known that St. Paul was imprisoned in Rome and wrote several of his epistles (letters) during his captivity there”

(<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Paul-the-Apostle>).

Also cf. https://amazingbibletimeline.com/blog/q6_apostles_die/ which says that, according to early writers, Peter “died at or about the same time with Paul, and in the Neronian persecution, A.D. 67,68.”

¹⁴ Cf. https://amazingbibletimeline.com/blog/q6_apostles_die/

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 9:4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles (Emphasis mine).

Now, here is something beautiful! You see, every time a Christian is persecuted, one positive thing happens: *it results* (as Christ says in v.13) *in the opportunity*¹⁶ to bear witness to the truth and to Christ, e.g. Paul & Silas singing hymns of praise to Christ in the prison cell & stocks in the Philippian jail while blood & puss oozed from their backs! And Christ promised that, in the hour of persecution, He would give them the most fitting words to speak (v.14-15)!

Now, such words may not necessarily prevent the Christian from being killed, but they would still glorify Christ!

And, even if it comes to it that the Christian gets killed for his faith, then (according to v.18) not a hair of his head would have perished without the will of his Father in heaven!¹⁷

These are all signs which would precede God's judgement on Jerusalem – His judgement on them for rejecting His Son (their Messiah)!

But what would be the sign closest to Jerusalem's destruction?

Well, Jesus says (in v.20) that *that* would be armies coming to surround Jerusalem!

It is then that, by Christ's kind warning (in v.21), His followers should not rush into the city to try and find protection behind the city walls! No, the city *and* its walls would get utterly destroyed! So, when the armies are still arriving, the Christians should flee to the mountains!

And Jerusalem?

Well, that city would be trampled underfoot until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (cf. v.24)!

What does that mean?

Well, these words are difficult to interpret.¹⁸

However, some of the most respected commentators interpret this to mean that the time of Jerusalem's oppression by non-Jews will last to the end of the centuries – yes, to the coming of final judgement and the return of Christ in glory,¹⁹ which is the very topic Jesus is going to address in the next verses (from v. 25 onwards)!

But here's a question: Is it so that the times of the Gentiles (spoken of by v.24) has ended on the 14th May 1948 when Israel became an independent state?

¹⁶ ἀποβήσεται a Future Indicative Middle 3rd Person Singular of ἀποβαίνω εἰς: (an idiom, literally 'to go away into') to result in a state—'to result in, to lead to...' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 781). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁷ Yes, note that v.18 of our text is a shortened version of the meaning of Mt 10:29-30 ***Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*** ³⁰ ***But even the hairs of your head are all numbered*** (Emphasis mine).

Also cf. HC LD 1 Answer 1, "...He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven ..."

¹⁸ "Jesus goes on to speak of the times of the Gentiles. This is not an easy expression and a variety of explanations has been suggested: the time for the Gentiles to execute God's judgments, or to be supreme over Israel, or to exercise the privileges hitherto belonging to Israel, or to have the gospel preached to them. The reference to these times as being fulfilled points to a divine purpose in them" (Morris, L. (1988). *Luke: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 3, pp. 316–317). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Hendriksen (ibid:939) who interprets v. 24b in this manner; and who also refers to the same interpretation by S. Greijdanus and Lenski. This is also in sync with the Apostle Paul's words of Rm 11:25 "***I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in...***" (Emphasis mine).

Well, I doubt, for, you see, Google tells me that, gauging by 2018 statistics, only 28% of eligible Jews live in Israel.²⁰

Besides, even today the very existence of Israel – and of Jerusalem – is still being threatened.

But here's the greatest reason for my doubt – i.e. that the great majority of Jews do not regard Jesus as their Lord and Saviour!²¹ They're still rejecting Him!

Well, so far re (the very long) Point 1 “Near Future.”

What our Lord now describes (from v.25 onwards), applies to His *return* rather than to the events of 70 AD!

Further Future

To be sure, some of the signs that preceded the fall of Jerusalem may also signify the final coming of our Lord. There will be false preachers with false messages/ideologies; persecution; wars & uprisings; earthquakes, famines & pestilences [v.10-11]. But there will be more of these, and they will be more intense.

Why will some of these appear again?

Well, because these have always accompanied God's judgements on those who have rejected Him!²²

So, all previous judgements of God are types of His final judgement.

And that's why some commentators have used the word “mirroring” – all of God's judgements mirror/reflect the same pattern as the final judgement!

But now, especially from v.25, our Lord gives signs that will specifically precede and accompany His Second Coming: signs in sun & moon & stars, and in the sea whose waves will be roaring so much that people will *faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.*²³

But there's also good news, because, just as the budding of the trees tells you that summer is very near, so will the appearance of these cataclysmic signs tell us that the coming of God's kingdom is near.

And then, says our Lord (in v.28), all God's loved ones can *stand up and lift up their heads, because their redemption is drawing near.*”

Then comes v. 32 with words that are hard to interpret: “***I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.***”²⁴

This generation?

Does it mean this race, i.e. the human race?

Does it mean the last generation that sees the start of these cosmic/cataclysmic changes?

Or does it mean the last generation before Jerusalem's fall?

Well, just as the *generation* before 70 AD, that saw the beginning of the signs re Jerusalem's fall – just as that generation did not pass away before that judgement,²⁵ so

²⁰ Cf. the exposition and diagram at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_population_by_country

²¹ For more on this, cf. Hendriksen (ibid:939).

²² Cf. e.g. Jer 18:9-11; Dan 9:27; Zech 11:6; Mal 3:1, 2. Also cf. Hendriksen (ibid:938)

²³ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Lk 21:26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁴ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Lk 21:32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁵ RC Sproul's interpretation of these words, for which cf. Sproul's audio sermon at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/generation-will-not-pass-away/>

will the generation that sees the beginning of the end not pass away before the Lord's return!²⁶

Then Jesus says (v. 33), "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**"²⁷

Is this true? Will His words never pass away? Will all these things happen? Will Jesus ever return?

Well, did you notice re Jerusalem's destruction of 70 AD, how everything came true exactly as our Lord had said? Everything: the deportation of Jews, and their settling among many nations, and about Gentile rule over Jerusalem – if all of that came true just as He had said, why would His predictions about the end of the age not come true?

In light of that, what is there for you and me to do?

That brings us to the last small point...

Ready

My brother & sister, on that last day of the age, what will be your greatest desire?

Well, is it not to stand before the Son of Man (as v.36 says)?

Is it not to stand before Him to whom all men are accountable – yes, to stand before Him and *not* to hear, "Go away into ..." but to hear, "Come, faithful servant – come into my kingdom"?

So, we want to stand before Him not only in the sense that we are *acquitted*, but also in the sense that we *are ready to serve* Him, our Master, for ever and ever!

How will we be successful?

Only if, in this life, you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour & Lord, and have had a personal relationship with Him.

Of course, such personal relationship with Jesus includes your perseverance in the faith – your perseverance as He preserves!

What does our text say about your & my perseverance in the faith?

Well, in short, Jesus (in our text) urges you & me to be prepared lest, when we are called to meet our Lord, *that* be found the *furthest* thing from our thoughts;²⁸ yes, lest that hour *come upon us as a snare.*²⁹

So, as we persevere, what are the dangers to be aware of?

Well, gauging by Christ's words (of v.34), they are twofold: the first one is *sensuality*, and the second one is *security*, i.e. seeking lasting security in temporary things!

Also for this interpretation, cf. Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (pp. 1898–1901). Peabody: Hendrickson), "He charges them to look upon those things as neither *doubtful* nor *distant* (for then they would not make a due impression on them), but as *sure* and very *near*. The destruction of the Jewish nation, 1. Was *near* (v. 32): *This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled*. There were some now alive that should see it; some that now heard the prediction of it. 2. It was *sure*..."

²⁶ "This end-time interpretation is supported by Bock who says, "The view preferred here is that the 'generation' that sees all these things refers to the generation present in verse 25. In other words, those who see the beginning of the end in the cosmic signs will see the arrival of the decisive era in the Son of Man's return. Once the events of the final act commence, they will take place rather quickly" (Bock, D. L. (1996). [*Luke*](#) (pp. 530–543). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

²⁷ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Lk 21:33). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁸ Well-said words of Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (pp. 1898–1901). Peabody: Hendrickson.

²⁹ Cf. Eccl 9:12 **Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.**

As example of sensuality, Jesus tells us not to let our hearts get weighed down by dissipation!

What is dissipation?

Well, it's *unbridled indulgence in a drinking party – drinking without any “brakes” on; a drinking bout which is marked by carousing and intoxication resulting in drunken headache, hangover.*³⁰

Perhaps you say, “Phew, if that’s the only danger I have to avoid, then I’m safe – then I’ll be able to stand before Christ on that last day!”

But, hang on, Jesus has given dissipation (drunkenness) as just one of many examples of the sins of sensuality – our first danger!

What about the second danger – *security*, which is the excessive (more-than-necessary) pursuit of the good things of this world?

Well, Jesus does not want you & me to have our hearts weighed down (or overcharged) with what He calls the *cares of this life*.

You see, whereas sensuality is the snare of those that are given to their pleasures, an excessive chase after security is the snare of the men of business, those who *want to be rich*.

To recap: Our Lord wants you & me to guard ourselves against these two dangers: sensuality and security, not only so that when death suddenly comes knocking on our door, but that *at any time* (yes also at this Christmas time) our hearts should not be weighed down (or overcharged) by worldly things.

Remember: although we are *in* this world, we are not *of* this world.³¹

So, what are you and I to do?

Well, in v.34 & 36, Jesus urges us to do two things: watch and pray! They always go together!³²

What does this NOT mean?

Well, watching & praying does not mean you & I should give all our energy into trying to work out the exact date on which our Lord would return! You see, gauging by the amount of time & effort some Christians are spending to try and predict that date, one should think that Christian theology is 90% just about eschatology (the end-times).

So, what does *watch & pray* then mean?

Well, *watching* will mean that you & I will watch in two ways: watch *against*, and watch *out for*; yes, we will watch *against* sin, and we will watch *out for* every opportunity of doing good. It also means that we will stay tuned-in to the reality of our Lord’s coming, so that we can be in a right frame to receive him, and bid him welcome.

That’s *watching*!

And what about *praying*?

Well, it means that we will keep up our communion with God; that we will pray always; and that *that* will be our habit; that we will also keep up set times for prayer; that we will abound in prayer; and pray upon all occasions.

³⁰ The horrible state described by the Greek word, *kraipalē* (κραিপάλη) (cf. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 564). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

³¹ Remember, our Lord Jesus even prayed about for the disciples and for you & me (in Jn 17:15), “**My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.**”

³² Cf. e.g. Neh 4:9 **But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.**

Are you watching and praying?
Are you ready?

AMEN (2865 words excluding footnotes)