

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS // LUKE 21:20-28

From the series, The Gospel of Luke

This passage directly deals with one of five core doctrines of the Christian faith: the imminent and visible return of Christ. At his first coming, which we celebrate at Christmas, he came in flesh and humility; he will come again with power and authority.

In this section from Luke, Jesus describes two cataclysmic events: first, the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70, and, secondly, the longer, larger view of his second coming. These descriptions contain two major messages:

1. God takes sin and judgement very seriously: the destruction of Jerusalem (v. 20-24)

Jesus, whose prophecies are always accurate and infallible, foretells of a time when those listening will “see Jerusalem surrounded by armies,” and this is the sign “that its desolation is near” (v. 20). Indeed, within a few decades, the armies of Rome would surround Jerusalem and not leave one stone standing on another. Jesus warns them to “flee to the mountains” (v.21)—God has always pointed his people to a refuge. Here it is the mountains outside the city; in the Old Testament, God warns Lot to flee Sodom, and for Noah to take refuge in the ark. For us, it is the cross of Christ. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower”—a refuge and place of safety (Proverbs 18:10). The entire Old Testament points to the reality of Jesus, the coming Messiah who will “fulfill all that is written” (v. 22). But, Israel has a legacy of killing her prophets, and this is what will happen to Jesus as well. Even in these “days of vengeance,” Jesus has a tenderness as he considers the suffering that will be felt particularly by “women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants” (v. 23)—an ethic for the welfare of babies and the unborn. “Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot” (v. 24) and will never be the same—it will not even be a country again for nearly two millennia. However, an even further date is indicated by the phrase “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (v. 24), likely pointing to the second coming of Christ.

2. God calls his church to be ready for Christ’s return: the second coming (v. 25-28)

At this point, Jesus shifts his focus to that later fulfillment. The second coming will see “signs in sun and moon and stars” (v. 25)—an indication that not only will judgement be seen on earth, but also in the heavens, and this will be a time of great fear (v. 27). As Colossians 1:17 teaches, Jesus has all authority over creation—all is in his power, and that which does not have an ear hears the Lord Jesus perfectly. However, in his second coming, everyone will be aware: “the heavens will be shaken...and they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud” (v. 27-28). Jesus concludes this passage with the only imperative in this section: “straighten up and raise your heads” (v. 28). Does the church live with a lifted head? Do we believe he is coming soon, and does this impact how we think, feel, and behave? Those who are in Christ have a sure salvation: we do not live *for* redemption or for his glorious appearance—we live *from* it, and it shapes our lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do we have a sense that Christ is our refuge? How does this look in our everyday lives?
2. How does Jesus’ regard for mothers, babies, and the unborn in this passage reveal his character?
3. What does it look like to live with a “lifted head”? What does this posture signal?