**THE SON OF MAN IS COMING**

***Mark 13:1-37***

***“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens” (vs. 26-27).***

Once Dr. Billy Graham, in his preaching, listed that there are certain things that all of us as human beings cannot escape. First, we cannot escape being born. We have been born, and we cannot be unborn. Second, we cannot escape death. We are going to die. Everybody in this room will be dead in the next hundred years. The third thing we cannot escape is the judgment of God. The Bible clearly says that the present heavens and earth are reserved for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly (2Pe 3:7). That day will be so great and dreadful because everybody must stand before our Lord Jesus, the Judge of the living and dead (Ac 10:42). In today’s lesson, Jesus plainly teaches us that human history is flowing toward that day and that he will come back again as Judge. But he also encourages the children of God, for them, that day will be a day of hope, joy and glory. Let’s think about some evident signs of Jesus’ Second Coming and what we must do while waiting for his return.

1. **The signs of the end (vs. 1-27)**

It was two days before Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus’ heart must have been very heavy and lonely because of his imminent death on the cross. Nobody really understood his situation. Even his close disciples did not know what was going on in his heart. But he taught the word of God in the temple to the end. ***As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” (1)*** At that time, the temple was the third temple in Jewish history, which Herod the Great began to build to win the favor of the Jews. It was still under construction after 46 years (Jn 2:20). According to Josephus, a renowned Jewish historian of the first century, the temple was considered an architectural wonder of ancient civilization. It covered about 1/6of the land area of old Jerusalem. The outward walls of the temple were white marbles and the rim of the roof and gates were clothed with gold and jewelry, reflecting the rays of the rising sun. Not knowing what was going on inside of Jesus’ heart, the disciples were amazed by the buildings and shouted many “wows.” Jesus was not upset by their many wows. Rather he took this opportunity to teach them very important lessons.

Look at verse 2. ***“‘Do you see all these great buildings?’ replied Jesus. ‘Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’”*** The disciples saw the outward splendor, but Jesus saw the inner corruption of the Jewish nation and the misuse of the temple. He omnisciently predicted the total destruction of the temple. Jesus’ words were literally fulfilled in 70 A.D. After conquering Jerusalem, Titus, the Roman emperor, ordered his soldiers to demolish the whole city and level its buildings to the ground (Josephus, Jewish Wars). The temple was the heart and pride of the Jewish nation, but it was totally destroyed and the nation ceased to exist for 2,000 years when they did not repent and fulfill God’s purpose for them. Likewise, the achievements of modern civilization are fascinating, but we must have spiritual insight to see its destiny.

Jesus’ prediction shocked the disciples. If the temple, which is called House of God, is destroyed, that must be the end of the world, they thought. At the same time, they were excited because the end of the current order would mean the advent of the new Messianic kingdom that Jesus would establish. ***So as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” (3-4***) The disciples basically asked two questions: first, the time of the end, and second, the signs of the end. Jesus answered their second question first, regarding the signs.

First, false messiahs will appear and deceive many. Look at verses 5-6. ***“Jesus said to them: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, “I am he,” and will deceive many.’”*** False messiahs claim that they are the messiah, who can give salvation, security and happiness through their teachings. Throughout history, various people have claimed to be the messiah. As the end of the age becomes near, more false messiahs will appear. They will even perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even believers (22). False messiahs can also be ideologies or political systems that falsely promise utopia. In the past century, we witnessed how communism misled many and resulted in catastrophe. These days secular humanism leads many people to relativism and liberalism. Relativism deprives people of absolute truth, faith, and morality in God. People without faith in God lose purpose, direction, and absolute moral standards in life. Many follow occults, witchcraft, and eastern religions like Buddhism and Bahai. Another false messiah is materialism. It captures the hearts and minds of young people until they only think about getting a good job and making a lot of money. Hedonism is another. Many indulge themselves with lust and drugs to experience momentary pleasures and end up as life-long slaves.

False messiahs’ deceptions are very destructive to those who follow them because they are led astray from God and his Christ to eternal destruction. In April 2014, a South Korean ferry, Sewol, sank while carrying 476 people and killing 304 people, mostly high school students who were on their way to a field trip. While the ship was sinking, passengers were told repeatedly by the crew members instructed by the captain, “Do not move. Just stay where you are. It’s dangerous if you move, so just stay where you are.” Many of them listened to the false instructions and remained in place. As the ferry tilted sideways, water soaked in and objects in the ship fell over, injuring people and blocking their way out. Meanwhile the captain and crew members abandoned the ship and the passengers. Similarly, whether we follow and listen to Jesus or false messiahs determines our eternal life or death. Nothing in this world can give us eternal life, meaning, freedom and happiness. Only Jesus Christ who died for us and rose again can give us these. So Jesus says, ***“Watch out that no one deceives you.”***

Second, wars and natural disasters. Look at verses 7-8. ***“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.”*** Human history can be called the history of wars. Now we hear of wars in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Sudan. There are many armed conflicts and collisions among ethnic groups, religions, and civilizations all over the world including Mexico, the Philippines, Yemen, Turkey, Lebanon, Congo, and Nigeria. Tensions between the U.S. and North Korea, Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan, and China and Japan are increasing. Jesus says that as the end time draws near, there will be more wars and conflicts. Natural disasters are also increasing. The statistics portal website lists the 10 most significant natural disasters by death toll, from 1980 to 2016. Eight of these ten deadliest disasters have occurred relatively recently after 2003, including earthquakes, tsunami, storm, drought and heat wave.

When we hear about such news of wars and disasters, Jesus says that we should not be gripped with fear because these are only the beginning of birth pains. We men never really know what birth pains are. But we understand that it is the greatest pain a human being can endure. Birth pains grow more intense and frequent as the time of the new birth draws near. But the pains are not meaningless. The pains ultimately bring forth a beautiful baby. Mothers endure the pain because of the joy of the birth of a new child. After the delivery, when a mom sees her baby, she forgets all the pain. As the end time draws near, the world will be filled with bad news. Just before the end, there will even be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now (19). But these are all necessary birth pains preceding the birth of a new world. Jesus points to his Second Coming beyond the horizon of this troubled world. The kingdom of God that he will bring to us at his coming is the fruit of these birth pains.

Third, severe persecutions. Look at verse 9. ***“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”*** The early Christians had to stand in local courts and be beaten, stoned and executed in public simply because they believed in Christ. In the same way, in the last days, secular governments will outlaw Christianity and openly persecute believers. This is a reality even today in many places like North Korea, China, and many Muslim nations. Even in America, the government now allows same-sex marriage, and many Christians feel restricted and uncomfortable to say that homosexuality is sin. In the end times, even family members will persecute one another like enemies (12). Right before Jesus’ coming, in the great distress, an Anti-Christ will rise, command people to worship him and persecute believers most severely. It would be truly painful to live in such times.

But Jesus greatly encourages us with some promises. Look at verses 10-11. ***“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”*** Jesus declares that the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Here the word “must” reveals God’s earnest determination to carry his gospel to all peoples of the world. The gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ. It is the good news that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). Due to our sins, we lost paradise and became slaves to Satan. All of us are destined to die once and after that to face judgment (Heb 9:27). Through his death on the cross, however, Jesus broke the power of sin, death, and Satan. When we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus as my personal Savior and Lord, God forgives us and wipes all our sins away. The Bible clearly promises that he will remember our sins no more (Heb 10:17). Then our names will be written in the book of life to inherit the restored paradise. God doesn’t want anyone to perish. He wants to fill his kingdom with the full number of people. This is our heavenly Father’s heart.

Through natural disasters, wars, and persecutions God is working for good to invite people to believe in his Son and be saved. God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, who is in control. Under such distress, many souls will become humble and seek God’s salvation. So our heavenly Father wants his children to preach the gospel to them even in the midst of our own difficulties and trials. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will be with us and empower us to speak just the right words even before our persecutors. He also assures us of our final victory as we stand firm to the end (13). We should not see the darkness of the world negatively. When we trust that God is in control over human history, the troubles of this world can be opportunities to spread the gospel to all nations and bring God’s love and salvation to people’s lives.

Fourth, Jesus’ coming on the clouds with great glory. Look at verses 24-25. ***“But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’”*** Just before Jesus’ coming, there will be drastic cosmic changes. The current heavenly order will be shaken. Disintegration of the existing order of the universe will be a prelude to the coming of the new order for a new heaven and a new earth. History will end with Jesus’ Second Coming.

Now look at verses 26-27. ***“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.”*** When he first came to the world, Jesus appeared as a humble baby in a stable. But at his Second Coming, Jesus will come in clouds as the King of kings and Lord of lords with great power and glory. A multitude of powerful angels will accompany him and usher him in with a loud voice and the trumpet call of God (1Th 4:16). Since Jesus’ coming is a universal event, all people on the earth will see and hear his coming. All unbelievers will mourn as they realize that they pierced Jesus on the cross, but did not repent and believe in him (Rev 1:7). They will mourn over the impending judgment they will have to face for eternity. But their mourning will be too late.

For all believers, however, Jesus’ coming will be a time of great joy. Jesus will send his angels and gather God’s children from the four corners of the earth. At that time, with the trumpet sound, those who have already fallen asleep in Christ will be raised imperishable, while those who are still alive will be lifted into heaven and be transformed to receive glorious resurrection bodies. When we throw ourselves into Jesus’ arms, we will forget all the pains and sufferings of this world. The Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4). We will be with our heavenly Father and the Lord forever in a new heaven and new earth. How glorious and wonderful it will be! Nothing in this world can surpass the beauty and majesty of Jesus’ Second Coming and the kingdom of God! This is our true hope. Praise God for granting us this living hope that can never perish, spoil or fade by sacrificing his one and only Son Jesus!

1. **Be on guard! Be alert! (vs. 28-37)**

Now that Jesus had explained about the signs of his coming, he teaches about when these things will happen. Look at verses 28-29. ***“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.”*** Just as a fig tree is a harbinger of summer, so these signs Jesus had been speaking of clearly indicate that his coming would follow shortly after. But many people’s foremost question may be “Exactly when will he come?” Jesus says in verse 32, ***“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*** Determination of Jesus’ Second Coming belongs to the authority of the Father. The Son will come precisely on the day God has designated for judgment. So no one knows about the exact time except the Father!

In that case, with what kind of attitude should we live? Look at verse 33. ***“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”*** Since we don’t know the exact time of our Lord’s coming—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn, we must be on our guard and be alert (35). Here Jesus’ warning is very emphatic***, “Be on guard! Be alert!”*** It means to “be ready and be awake.” Throughout this whole passage, Jesus warns us six times with the similar words, ***“Watch out”, “You must be on your guard”, “So be on your guard”, “Be on your guard! Be alert!”, “Keep watch”, “Watch” (5, 9, 23, 33, 35, 37).*** When he comes suddenly, he doesn’t want to see us sleeping (36). We may be spiritually sleeping like the people in Noah’s time. At that time, people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood suddenly came and destroyed them all (Lk 17:27). How can we be ready and awake? We can keep watch by holding on to the word of God. Psalm 119:105 says, *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”* The word of God guides our lives. God’s word is absolute truth. Jesus says in verse 31, ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*** When we faithfully study the Bible, put our trust in its teachings and obey them in sincere repentance, the Holy Spirit enlightens us and makes us awake and ready.

We can also be alert through prayer. The study of the word and prayer go together. Through prayer, we can maintain an intimate relationship with God and a holy life. E. M. Bounds says in his book, entitled “The Purpose in Prayer,” “Prayer and a holy life are one. They mutually act and react. Neither can survive alone. The absence of the one is the absence of the other…The hindrances of prayer are the hindrances of a holy life.” In addition, we can keep watch while faithfully serving God’s work which he has entrusted to us. Each of us has a God-given task to do for his kingdom: Feeding God’s flock, serving the body of Christ, and loving our neighbors in practical ways. Like a faithful servant, who is serving his master’s house while eagerly waiting for the master’s return, we can be awake and sober.

Most of all, we can be ready and alert when we follow in our Lord’s footsteps. For the joy set before him, Our Lord Jesus took up his rugged cross. He was despised and rejected. He took up our pain and bore our suffering. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. But he rose again and is sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. He is ready to come again. Now he wants us to put our hope on the joy of his coming and the kingdom of God and follow him. He says in Mk 8:34, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* If we want to follow Jesus, we need to deny ourselves by throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. We must take our cross and follow him with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:1-2). As we follow Jesus with perseverance, Jesus promises his rewards for our faithfulness in Revelation 22:1: *“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”* Are you ready for Jesus’ coming? Let’s respond to Jesus’ words with  *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).*