

Sermon Draft for November 16, 2025

Text: Luke 21:5–28 (29–36)

Sermon: Redemption

As we near the end of the church year, we focus on the end of time and look to being with Jesus in the eternal glories of heaven. This includes, on this the second-last Sunday of the church year, considering the fearful events that befall all people, including Christians, as the end approaches and throughout our lives.

Jesus does so in our Gospel text, as does Malachi in the Old Testament Reading. Yet we will ***“make a joyful noise to the Lord”*** (Psalm 98:4), for while ***“heaven and earth will pass away, . . . the Lord will keep [us] from all evil.”*** In the end, God will open to us glorious things that we cannot yet begin to comprehend.

Our Gospel from Luke chapter 21 finds Jesus in the last week before his crucifixion. In the preceding chapters he has been giving his final teachings to those around him, many of whom are not yet believers. Now, however, he will speak privately to the disciples.

The prompting for his comments about what will happen to Jerusalem a few years hence and what will come upon people nearing the end of time is an observation by one of his disciples (Mark 13:1) about the beauty of the temple, about the stones and the offerings that decorated the temple. This temple was built by Herod, replacing or greatly expanding and beautifying the one built upon the return of the Hebrews from exile in Babylon. It must have been quite beautiful, but it likely still did not compare to the rich and exceedingly ornate temple built by Solomon some nine hundred years earlier.

Most of us have had the experience in which a person is explaining something and they give so many details and takes so long that we get a little frustrated. They can't seem to get wherever they're finally going so you blurt out, "What's the point?!"

In a sense our Gospel reading is a bit like that. It's twenty-four verses describing what it will be like as the end of time approaches, when Jesus comes to judge and take his own to himself into the glories of heaven. But the details in describing the end here are both long and hard to understand. It will be an event like no other, ever. Even now, while still in time, it's hard enough to view and understand all things around us the workings of nature, the vast array of stars in the heavens, the complicated interactions among peoples, the ways our bodies work. Much harder to get some sort of grip on what it'll be like at the very end when Jesus returns and has all people gather before him.

One of the challenges with a passage like this is to figure out if there are specifics here to grasp or if the Holy Spirit is simply attempting to catch our attention to make us keenly aware of how critical it is that we stay close to Jesus by whatever means we can.

Indeed, this is a bit like reading the seemingly strange events recorded in Revelation, where John is trying to convey things of the world and the church that are, in essence, beyond our understanding. He uses such picturesque and figurative language that is clearly beyond rational thinking. So, let's be clear here. The details of what is being described in this text are not nearly as critical as is the out-of-this-world importance of having faith in our Savior Jesus and letting him keep and guide us all the way through our lives until the end comes.

To help us keep our eyes and faith fixed on Jesus, let's focus on a few particular words of this passage, ones at the end of the whole Gospel reading, just verses 25 through 28, and let's see what they might hold for us this morning. Luke gives us as signs of the end some things great and terrible that everyone will see. Things like thunderous sounds as of a sea, people fainting from fear, and the shaking of the heavens all point to the fearfulness of the coming of the end of time and the beginning of eternity.

And then all will see Jesus coming, coming in power and great glory. There are other places in the New Testament describing his arrival that speak of all the angels being with him, of trumpets blowing, of great light shining, and so on. It will indeed be an event like nothing ever seen before!

Even just a cursory pondering of these words can bring great fear to a person. Think on it! Earthquakes, great thundering and storms like never before, with even the heavens being shaken, will make any normal person afraid.

But what is it to be like for the believer? Here's the critical point for us this morning. The unbeliever, who now senses that his accountability to God is coming due, that he never did enough to satisfy God's holy demands, but, even more, that he simply rejected the Jesus who now gathers all before him to be judged, will be ***"fainting with fear"*** (v 26) stooped over, with head hanging low, low in great abjection. As opposed to that, Jesus says, ***"straighten up and raise your heads"*** (v 28b).

As believers we stand up tall, raises our heads, look to Jesus whom we trust. We trust in this Jesus because Jesus fulfilled his promise to save, save by paying the full debt of our sin and when he died on the cross. We trust Jesus to keep us in faith until the very end. And we trust Jesus to come and retrieve us from this vale of trauma and trial and take us to himself, into the glories beyond all glories, those of heaven!

What's interesting is how Jesus labels this end of all things for the believer. He says, ***“Because your redemption is drawing near”*** (v 28c). So just what is redemption? It can be identified in a couple of different ways. Redemption is a buying back of that which was lost or stolen. Or, one could say, it's paying the price for freedom from that which kept one a slave to something. Our goodness was lost when Adam and Eve sinned against God and brought that lost condition upon all of mankind. What they did is make all of mankind, their descendants, just like them. That lost condition makes everyone, then, a slave to her or his sin and sinful condition.

It's not possible ever to free ourself from that slavery.

So, when we think of the redemption that frees a person from that lostness and their slavery to sin, we really have two redemptions.

Well, maybe three. The first is when Jesus gave up his life to pay the sin debt, the debt that men of all places and of all time amassed against God. That redemption took place two thousand years ago when Jesus died on the cross. The second redemption takes place when we become a believer, when we first began to trust in the one properly called the Redeemer, Jesus. That usually comes through the washing of water with the Word of God, Baptism. That redemption stays with us it is a gift from God. But when we die, we need redemption from the bond of death. The third redemption, then, is when the believer is raised from the dead and goes to be with Jesus. For every believer, redemption is truly near, near because by the faith given by the Spirit, it's only a matter of time until this final redemption is completed.

A few years ago, a movie came out entitled The Firing Squad. It recounted the life of a drug dealer, of how he was dealing drugs in Indonesia, where to be caught was an automatic death penalty. There were several times he had come in contact with those who wished him to become a believer in Jesus. Of course, life was too good for him even to consider anything other than the lavish lifestyle he was leading. But, alas, he was caught. After some time in prison, as believers spoke to him often, and as the time of his execution came closer, the beauty of the lives of those confessing their faith to him caused him to begin to explore the Scriptures.

He started reading the Bible and became a believer. He, too, now beautifully demonstrated the words of this passage when it came time for his execution, for he did indeed stand up and raise his head high, even at that moment before the firing squad. His final redemption was indeed near, in the next few moments! He now had no fear of death, for that was the door by which he would go to be with Jesus.

As we ponder our own end, it might well bring a bit of fear. It's not something anyone can experience or rehearse ahead of time. When the day comes, it's going to be brand new, something we've never faced before. Yet because God the Spirit has remade us into people now counted holy by God, because he is with us at all times, because our sin debt against God has indeed been paid by Jesus, there is no reason to fear death itself, but there really is only eager anticipation to be with Jesus.

Yes, our redemption is near, as near as our own deaths or as near as the approaching last day. For whether our time to meet Jesus is soon or still a long way off, He, as our Redeemer, is always near with us and in us. All we can ever do is thank God for the gift of faith and thank him for the home he has already prepared for us with him.

In Jesus name! Amen