

Luke 21:28 (ESV)

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In 2004... the shoreline of Sri Lanka... was devastated by a horrifying and massive tsunami. ... Do you remember that? It wasn't too long ago. ... The destruction caused in just a few minutes was unimaginable... with close to 40,000 lives lost and thousands of homes wiped out. It took months to recover from the devastation.

As the rebuilding process began... one of the strange discoveries found out was that prior to the tsunami... animals in the wildlife reserves close to the sea... instinctively seemed to sense the danger that was approaching. As a result... they moved to higher ground or further inland and escaped the effects of the killer waves. ... After the tsunami... the people also are now wiser as to what they should do... if a similar disaster threatens to strike again.

Sadly... when it involves God's timing in the affairs of the world... most people seem to find it difficult to understand what's happening! ...

A Pew Research Center survey of more than 10,000 adults... conducted in April of 2022... found that 39 percent called these the “end times”... while 58 percent were assured that humanity was not careening towards catastrophe. ... Only about four-in-ten Americans say we're “living in the end times.”

(Now)... nearly half of those surveyed...who identify themselves as “Christian”... say Judgement Day is closing in... but there are big differences within American Christendom — 63 percent of non-Catholics call these the end times... but only 27 percent of Catholics say that it is.

There's also a political tilt — 45 percent of Republicans see doomsday is near... against just 33 percent of Democrats. ... College graduates were more skeptical of the looming apocalypse... than were those with only high school certificates.

With all that is taking place around us today... whether you are a Republican or Democrat... Catholic or Protestant... College graduate or High School graduate... Luke 21:28 says something that you had better not ignore!

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Today... I am going to cover one of the most astounding signs that Christ's return is near... as we come to message number three of the Olivet Discourse in the Gospel of Luke. Up until now... we have been dealing with signs that pointed to both the destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus warned His disciples about – and it **did** happen in 70 A.D. – and also the end times... just before Jesus returns to earth. The signs parallel both events and they look the same. ... However they will intensify as Jesus' return gets closer.

Jesus spoke of several signs to monitor His return in the Olivet Discourse – which many people are discounting and ignoring. ... Several scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments give other signs as well. Before I delve into the signs that our passage today presents... I would like to briefly cite a few evidences that some of the other passages portray... which Jan Markell mentioned this week in her Olive Tree Ministries Newsletter. Here are a few of her observations that she sent out this week.

Time flies. Years race by. But, 2024 has been a stunner in many ways. And many events remind me that the world is running out of time before the last act of a major drama plays out. In other words, the Church Age is winding down.

Her article is a listing of ten reasons that she gives for this assessment. I am not going to read all ten. But here are just five of them.

1. Israel is alone. *After she was brutally attacked in October of 2023, one would have thought the world would rally to her side. Not so! Not even America is now her ally. The U.S. is withholding weapons and intelligence.*

The International Criminal Court wanted to arrest Benjamin Netanyahu in May just for defending his country. The European Union, the United Nations, the World Economic Forum, and the International Court of Justice, have all denounced the Jewish state just for wanting to wipe out Hamas thugs. Zechariah 12:3 is in play. She is isolated and is the world's burdensome stone.

2. There is a new level of calling evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20). *Hamas is celebrated around the world!*

Christians are persecuted like never before. Islam is glorified, particularly on college campuses. Those who protest abortions are jailed. The White House and U.N. mourned the death of Iran's President Raisi on May 19, the "Butcher of Tehran."

3. The world is leaderless. *There is not one global leader to whom the world looks. Governments everywhere operate like the Keystone Kops. World War III could easily erupt as a result. The world is unsure of just who is running the White House. The stage is being set for a Mr. Fix-It, whom the world will celebrate. They just want stability and someone in charge to enforce peace and security.*

4. There is a rush to global government. *And strangely, unusual power is being given to the corrupt World Health Organization, who could end up being the leader of the world. They met in May and could use another pandemic to unite the world. The stage was set with Covid. They have targeted 2025 as a possible timeline.*

5. A new way of doing business is waiting in the wings. *It will be cashless. It will be crypto. It will be blockchain so that it tracks your every purchase. It could be in play by the time this magazine reaches your mail box, though power brokers may delay it until after our November election. Life with central bank digital currency (CBDC) will cause life as we know it to dramatically change! It will be at the heart of the Beast system, but many think it will be implemented sooner.*

...[P A U S E] ...

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²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

...[P A U S E] ... Let’s take a look now... at the signs that our passage (the Olivet Discourse in Luke) present.

Luke 21:25-28

Catastrophic upheavals will occur in the heavens. Because Jesus created all of the suns and stars of space... and because He upholds “all things by the word of his power” ... it will be no big thing for Him to shake the very heavens themselves when He returns.

Hebrews 1:2-3 (ESV)

² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power....

Author John Phillips writes: “*If... He originated the Creation with a Big Bang... it will not be hard for Him to herald His coming with a few **more** big bangs along the way*”. ... After all... when He was **born**... He put a new

star in the sky... and when He **died**... He darkened the sun for a while... (Matt. 2:2; and 27:45).

The total picture is indeed very vivid. All at once the sun becomes darkened. Naturally the moon now also ceases to impart its light. And since sun and moon exert a powerful influence on our planet — think (for example) about the moon and the tides — it is not surprising that the sea also is deeply disturbed. ... Terrifying sounds are heard. ... The result of all this... is that people will be so frightened... they will (commonly) **faint** from fear.

There will be widespread dread at these ominous omens... when the “natural laws” are suspended. ... The word *perplexity* here has been translated in various ways — “*at a loss for a way*” (for example)... or... “*at their wits end*.” ... It depicts the utter moral and mental bankruptcy of even the strongest (and most creative) minds on the planet... when they are confronted by these coming upheavals. “The powers of heaven shall be shaken”... and the people of earth will be panicked.

You can understand why. ... Here are some other descriptions from Scripture about this:

Isaiah 13:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰ For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

Isaiah 34:4 (ESV)

⁴ All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a

scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.

Joel 2:31 (ESV)

³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

I agree with Warren Wiersbe about these heavenly signs:

These awesome signs will bring terror to the lost people of the world, but hope to those who have trusted the Lord during the Tribulation period ... for these believers know that the Lord's coming will be soon. Believers today look for the Saviour, not signs. However, as we see "coming events casting their shadows," we believe that the Lord's return is near.

Luke 21:29-31

The Lord then proceeded to use an object lesson of a fig tree to reinforce the importance of being alert and understanding the signs that will come. Signs are important to us. They give us *information* that we need to make decisions. They give us *direction* so we know what path to take as we travel. Signs also give us *conviction* and *confirmation* that we are traveling on the right path to the destination we desire. Signs give us an *indication* of how close we are to our desired goal. The signs that the Lord has given to us give us information, direction, conviction, confirmation, and an indication of His soon return, just like the signs of summer near the end of spring. The signs are to help us get ready for His coming. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Jesus draws attention to the fig tree... and other trees... to reinforce his truth about His kingdom and the world conditions before He returns. The fig tree is a picture of *the nation of Israel*... during times of peace and prosperity.

1 Kings 4:25 (ESV)

²⁵ And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.

Hosea 9:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers....

Micah 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

Zechariah 3:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ ... I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. ¹⁰ In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.”

Earlier in Luke... we saw Jesus tell a parable. His Jewish audience knew that He spoke of Israel when He used the imagery of a fig tree.

Luke 13:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ ⁸ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

Jesus ministered to Israel for three years. At the end of those three years... Jesus referenced the still unproductive fig tree. ... In Matthew 21:18-20 Jesus saw a fig tree that had leaves. It showed the signs of bearing fruit. But when He saw there was no fruit... He cursed the tree and it immediately withered. This was a picture of God’s displeasure with Israel. They were supposed to bear fruit – but they didn’t. So they would grow dormant for 2,000 years... and they did. (This is what the Fall of

Jerusalem in 70A.D was about. The fig tree (Israel... as a nation) withered... and the Jews were scattered to the four corners of the earth for thousands of years.

Jesus (a few days later... in this Olivet Discourse) picks-up the same imagery once again. ... When you see the dry... brittle branches... on the figurative fig tree (which is Israel)... when it starts to fill with sap... when the branches soften... and begin to bud... then you are to know (just as you can know from a real fig tree that summer is near)... you can know something else is coming soon. When you see the figurative fig tree (the nation Israel) begin to show new life... you can know that Jesus' return is near.

Let me say it again. If you understand this – it ought to make you want to jump up and shout with excitement! ... What Jesus is saying (here) is this: When you see the nation Israel begin to show new life... you will know that My return is near.

The fig tree that the Lord cursed was a picture of Israel's barrenness. The Lord (now) tells us... when the fig tree begins to bud (when the nation shows new life)... after it has been dormant for a period of time... then know that Christ's kingdom is at hand. The time will be near (just as signs on a literal fig tree show that summer is near.)

On May 14, 1948, the nation of Israel was reborn. It rapidly awakened from its slumber and began to bud forth like an awakened fig tree. In one day... Israel was reborn. ... This is unheard of in the annals of history. No race of humans has ever been scattered for 2,000 years and remained a distinctive race. No... they have always blended into the other races and become indistinguishable. Where are the Philistines today...? The Phoenicians...?

Or anyone else that the Romans conquered and scattered. It is a miracle that the Jews remained a people group... and Isaiah foretold of this miracle.

Isaiah 66:8 (ESV)

⁸ Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.

...And perhaps even more astounding is Ezekiel's prophecy about Israel coming back as a nation.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Bringing Israel back as a nation (Ezekiel said) would happen in two phases. The first phase would be a physical re-assembling. That is what has already happened (May 14, 1948.) They physically returned from the four corners of the earth. They made a physical government with laws and operations. Even though they have some religious activity and formalities... BUT(!) Judaism has no vital spirituality (no life breath) – yet! Many Jews are athiests. They are as secular as any nation on earth. The second phase has not happened – but it will! Israel is in the land but it is going to take the Tribulation with the 144,000 evangelists and their experiencing God's provision and protection when they flee to Petra – that is going to breathe the spirit back into Israel. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now... let's go back to what Jesus said – when you see the new life of the nation in its beginning stage (phase one of Ezekiel's prophecy)... then know that the return of Christ will be VERY close. THIS IS EXACTLY WHERE WE ARE TODAY... FOLKS!

Jesus said that we are to notice the fig tree (which I understand to be Israel)... but He also mentioned something else.

Luke 21:29

“*And all the trees*” - Jesus added. Israel is not the only nation to watch. We are to watch Israel in relation to all the other trees. What are those...? The fig tree is Israel... and other trees - are other nations. Notice them together... How do the other trees relate to the fig tree? Zechariah 12:3 tells us what to look for... with regard to the fig tree and all the other trees.

Zechariah 12:3 (ESV)

³ On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it.

Earlier... as I opened this message... I read Jan Markkel’s newsletter. She showed clear evidence that (like no other time in history) this is being fulfilled before our very eyes!

1. Israel is alone. *After she was brutally attacked in October of 2023, one would have thought the world would rally to her side. Not so! Not even America is now her ally. The U.S. is withholding weapons and intelligence.*

The International Criminal Court wanted to arrest Benjamin Netanyahu in May just for defending his country. The European Union, the United Nations, the World Economic Forum, and the International Court of Justice, have all denounced the Jewish state just for wanting to wipe out Hamas thugs. Zechariah 12:3 is in play. She is isolated and is the world’s burdensome stone.

Perhaps you need to prepare yourself for our next verse (here) in Luke. It needs to wake us all up.

Luke 21:32-33

In other words verse 33 says: DO NOT TURN A BLIND EYE TO THESE SCRIPTURE PROPHECIES!!! Do so at your own GREAT RISK.

So... what does verse 32 mean? “*This generation will not pass away until all has taken place.*” ... [P A U S E] ... It means... Folks... that we are not living in the last days. By means of God’s timetable – we are living in the last seconds! ...

Obviously... this statement did not have in mind the generation *to* which He was speaking... because that generation has long since passed away. That was the generation that witnessed the death of the nation of Israel. (They witnessed the fig tree wither.) ... No. It must (therefore) refer to the generation *of* which He was speaking — the generation that would witness the rebirth of the fig tree and its isolation from all the other trees. It refers to us!

But a word of caution is needed here. ... I am not calling for us all to climb to the top of one of the mountains surrounding us and do nothing but wait. A “generation” is not a hard and fast unit for measuring the passing of time... (Back in the 1970’s I heard people say it meant “40 years.”) ... But it probably means AROUND 100 years. ...It is flexible. The generation that witnessed the demise of the nation of Israel was a period of time that ran from the time Christ spoke on the Mt. of Olives... to A.D. 135 (And that is approximately one hundred years). But (you see) the Lord never intended for us to know the exact date of His coming for His Bride (the Church) – which we call “the Rapture.” ... A “generation” is an approximation. (I think it means within a 100 year timespan.) It is general enough to be a definite sign that we can get excited about – but not specific enough to set a date.

The date for the *rapture* of the church is settled in heaven - but it is a secret date. All speculations and guesses as to that day and hour are doomed to fail.

Also settled in heaven is the date of the Lord's *return* to rescue Israel and rule the world. That date (however) is not a secret. Those who are alive during the Tribulation can know the date of their rescue. It will be 1,260 days from the time the Antichrist sets up his image in the temple. (Luke does not address this matter. We must seek details in the book of Daniel... the Olivet discourse as recorded by Matthew... and the book of Revelation.)

What is the practical value of all of this information?

Luke 21:34-36

I believe (for many reasons found in Scripture) that those who are believers when Christ first comes in the clouds to rapture the church... will not go through the Tribulation. (That is the subject for another sermon.) ... But the two mighty witnesses of Revelation 7 and the 144,000 witnesses seen in Revelation 11 are going to affect a lot of souls – turning people in the Tribulation to place their faith in Jesus. (And) Jesus (here) encourages THEM.

Remember that Jesus spoke from the Mt of Olives to His current and future generations... and in these verses He was speaking inspiration EVEN to those who will live through the awful Tribulation. Pray to have strength to endure.

In the meantime (to us... as Believers today)... Don't let down your guard. Don't give up. These are great days to live for God! Jesus encouraged His followers — in our day... and future Believers of the Tribulation — to be in a continuous state of alertness. Like faithful household stewards... we have business to attend to. We maintain readiness by fulfilling our responsibilities... not allowing ourselves to become passive by idle complacency or distracted by meaningless activity. Then (when the Master returns) we don't have to scramble at the last minute to get our lives in order.

Author Doug Mendenhall wrote a brief parable (back in in September 2009) that should cause all of us to pause and reflect:

Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through and [wondered if] he could spend a day or two with us.

I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you hit town?"

I mean, it's Jesus, you know, and it's not every day you get the chance to visit with him. It's not like it's your in-laws and you have to stop and decide whether the advantages outweigh your having to move to the sleeper sofa.

That's when Jesus told me he was actually at a convenience store out by the interstate.

I must have gotten that Bambi-in-headlights look, because my wife hissed, "What is it? What's wrong? Who is that?"

So I covered the receiver and told her Jesus was going to arrive in eight minutes, and she ran out of the room and started giving guidance to the kids—in that effective way that Marine drill instructors give guidance to recruits. ...

My mind was already racing with what needed to be done in the next eight—no seven—minutes so Jesus wouldn't think we were reprobate loser slobs.

I turned off the TV in the den, which was blaring some weird scary movie I'd been half watching. But I could still hear screams from our bedroom, so I turned off the reality show it was tuned to. Plus, I turned off the kids' set out on the sun porch, because I didn't want to have to explain *Jon & Kate Plus Eight* to Jesus, either, six minutes from now.

My wife had already thinned out the magazines that had been accumulating on the coffee table. She put *Christianity Today* on top for a good first impression. Five minutes to go.

I looked out the front window, but the yard actually looked great thanks to my long, hard work, so I let it go. What could I improve in four minutes anyway?

I did notice the mail had come, so I ran out to grab it. Mostly it was Netflix envelopes and a bunch of catalogs tied into recent purchases, so I stuffed it back in the box. Jesus doesn't need to get the wrong idea—three minutes from now—about how much on-line shopping we do.

I ran back in and picked up a bunch of shoes left by the door. Tried to stuff them in the front closet, but it was overflowing with heavy coats and work coats and snow coats and pretty coats and raincoats and extra coats. We live in the South; why'd we buy so many coats? I squeezed the shoes in with two minutes to go.

I plumped up sofa pillows, my wife tossed dishes into the sink, I scolded the kids, and she shooed the dog. With one minute left I realized something important: Getting ready for a visit from Jesus is not an eight-minute job.

Then the doorbell rang.

Getting ready for a visit from Jesus is not an eight-minute job.

Are you ready for Jesus?

His coming is NOT (simply) an amusing story.