

*Standing Before The Son Of Man*  
*By Jason Huff*  
*Malachi 3:16-4:6, 2 Peter 3:9-15, Luke 21:5-36*

This week's final Scripture reading comes from Luke 21:5-36. Listen now to God's Word. "Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

So, how about Mother's Day? When I first realized that this passage was going to fall today, I had no idea what to do with it. What do the most apocalyptic passage in Luke and Mother's Day have in common? Earthquakes and famine and terror are not good Mother's Day material! I had half a mind to switch passages and just skip it. But God does things for a reason, and we've been working through Luke for a year now. I knew that there had to be a connection. As it turns out, there is.

There are a few things that unite all mothers. Mothers love their children, and they go out of their way to show that love to their children. Every coat zipped up, every meal fixed, every playdate scheduled and soccer practice attended, every scraped knee kissed and TV show missed to spend time together, that's love. It doesn't take having a biological child to be a mother, just a loving heart towards those God puts in their care.

Mothers want to protect their children out of love. When they're little, parents attempt to shelter them. But as they grow and mature, we find that the best way to protect them is not to control them but to lead them by teaching and example. Moms can't monitor their kids all day every day, but a wise mother prepares a child for the world so that, when the time is right, they will know right from wrong and make good choices.

Beyond love and protection, though, mothers want to see their children succeed, not just to survive but thrive! As parents, we give our children opportunities to stretch and grow. We stay on them about their homework and check their papers. We sign them up for lessons for everything from swimming to piano. We wind up exhausted from all the work our kids are doing! But we do it so that our children might flourish. We celebrate moms today because we recognize that it's a sacrificial job, and it's worthy of praise.

In the midst of the talk of wars and revolutions and signs from heaven, it's easy to miss that the passage we heard this morning has behind it the exact same motivations. God loves us desperately and totally. He made us and created us, and He calls those of us who believe in Him His very own children. He wants to save us from the destructiveness and death that sin cause, and He taught us the way of righteousness so we might prosper. And when we in our sinfulness failed, He sacrificed everything by coming and rescuing us through the mystery of the cross. The first person of the Trinity is known as the Father for a reason; He wants to be known to us as a parent who cares for us. We love our mothers for all they are and all they've done for us, and at their best, they provide an insight into the unending love the Father has for us.

That's what stands at the heart of this passage – and at the heart of all biblical apocalyptic literature. It doesn't exist in a vacuum. Our culture likes disaster films because, frankly, guys like to watch stuff blow up. I know I do! But there's a world of difference between the biblical passages that are apocalyptic and popular apocalyptic stories, and that's due to context. Every passage in the Bible that deals with the end times has a point to make about God – His mercy, His justice, His love, His judgment. There's a lot more to them than doom and destruction. There's tons of material in this passage, but let's just look at a few of the things we can glean from it for our lives today, ways in which God loves us and protects us and guides us into His kingdom as our perfect parent.

*One way God shows His love for us in today's passage is by showing us what really matters versus what just seems important.* As children, we don't always know what's important. We only know what we like and that we want it now. It's the reason you don't take a 4-year-old down the toy aisle every time you go to Meijer. If you gave a child a choice between what he really needs and what he really wants, he's going to choose what he really wants. That's another reason why we love our mothers...they made us eat our vegetables...or at very least, they didn't serve us macaroni and cheese every single meal. What we like is not always what's good for us, and what impresses us might not be in our best interests. Of course, sometimes we grow out of this and sometimes we don't. When we grow older, the flashy things just cost more money!

At the beginning of this passage, the disciples are in awe of the temple in Jerusalem. And in Jesus' era, it was truly amazing. Over 40 years of work had gone into it, and where it wasn't covered with gold inlays, the stones were pure white. As the sun would rise over Jerusalem, the light would hit the gold and it would be nearly blinding...at the right time, you could see the temple from far away, sparkling in the distance. The temple was a sight to behold.

That said, the disciples are doing what most people did...mistaking the glory of the temple for the glory of God, and not realizing that God desires a temple in our hearts more than one made out of stone. Jesus pointed out that the temple didn't really matter...it would disappear. In 70 AD, the Jewish temple was destroyed, and since that time, the Jews have not been able to make the sacrifices required by the law of Moses. What Jesus said about the destruction of Jerusalem has already come true. Forgiveness through animal sacrifice is no longer an option. But it's no longer necessary. As Hebrews 10 says, "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." The new and better way was coming, but the disciples had to see that it was Jesus who really mattered, not the temple.

Jesus warns the disciples too about false messiahs and wars and revolutions for the same reasons. It was easy to want to rush the coming of the Kingdom...just like it is now. It's easy to want the glories that God has in store when His Kingdom is finally and permanently established. But we can get so caught up in the signs of the Kingdom that we can forget that it's the LORD who is most important. Jesus wants us to put first things first.

If it was easy for the first century church to get distracted and unfocused, how much more it is for us! So many things pull at our time; so many events demand our attention. It's so easy for us to live a pleasant life without thinking about God. We like our bright and shiny things. But we have to learn that they aren't what life is about. Our moms made us put down the Sugar Bomb cereal and made us get Wheaties...it didn't always taste as good, but being healthy was more important than loving every meal. In the same way, God's cautions and warnings may be painful. It's difficult to follow after what really matters when everything else looks so fun. But God knows the best way for us. He knows that sin destroys and pleads with us to avoid it. He wants to give us eternal life where we have no regrets, only joy at being able to love Him and serve Him. He will always want what's best for us...always.

*Another way that God shows His love for us is how He prepares us for what lies ahead.* As we said before, a good mother protects her children by leading them, by preparing them for whatever may come. God does the same thing by sharing with us glimpses of the future. Jesus knows what is coming and gives the disciples clear pictures of what will happen...not to impress or scare them, but to ready them.

The incredible signs Jesus discusses – the wars, the earthquakes, the famines – are not in and of themselves the preparation. The disciples aren't to be surprised by anything they see, merely to be watchful and mindful. Just like seeing leaves on the trees means summer is close at hand, seeing the signs of the end tells us that God is bringing about the reconciliation of all things. The signs are important, but they aren't the key. The key to the preparation is in God's telling us what lies ahead for the disciples (and for us in their stead). Jesus tells the disciples that persecution is coming, that even their families may hate them. He will give them the right words so they may testify about Him, but even then, some of them will become martyrs. Jesus doesn't pull any punches – this is going to be a prolonged period of suffering and sacrifice. But He also assures them that they will not perish – they may die, but they will gain everlasting life.

Jesus also prepares the disciples for Jerusalem's fall. It would have been difficult for the disciples to abandon the city; it had been considered the holiest city in all of Israel. But Jesus warns that it will no longer be the place of God's favor but of God's judgment. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells about how over 1,000 people lost their lives when a false prophet led crowds back into the city while it was burning during the siege, telling them they had to return to see God's salvation coming for the Jews. Jesus warns the disciples so they might not be deceived. Jesus finally prepares His disciples – all the disciples throughout history – for the end, for His return. Redemption is coming. Don't be afraid; be joyful that God is finally coming back to claim His own! In the midst of suffering, your joy and hope will be in the salvation that will be made complete as Jesus' return.

This passage makes it clear that we don't have an easy road ahead of us. Those who follow Christ faithfully will not have trouble-free lives. We may not face the persecution of the first century, but we can expect to be attacked for standing for morals and ethics in a culture that is throwing them away. Nevertheless, being aware that it will happen should reassure us that we are not suffering in vain. We also might have to ponder: if I'm never on the receiving end of any criticism for my faith, am I sharing it the way Christ told me to? This passage makes it clear that persecution often leads to witness. It's how we stand up under fire that compels people to rethink the message of the Gospel. At the same time, we can be comforted – if God is for us, who can be against us? Can an insult or a punch or even a bullet stop God's love for us? No! God promises to be with us through death and beyond death into eternal life.

As parents, we can't shield our children from everything, and when they grow up, we have less and less we can do to save them from harm, or even themselves. But we can pray for their salvation. We can pray that God is preparing their hearts for the work He wants to do, whether they're 5 months old or 50 years old. Our prayer for our boys has never been that they grow up to have great jobs or wealth or even comfort...it's been that they would know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. That's preparation we can do in advance, preparation whose results we will only know in eternity. But just as God prepares us for what we face, we too can pray that we would be faithful to Christ and that the generations that come after us would share that faith.

*The final way God shows His love in this passage is through teaching and encouraging us what to do as we see the end times approaching.* Jesus has pointed out what's important and what's unimportant, He's prepared the disciples so that they know what's coming, and then He tells them what to do about it. Be careful not to let the anxieties of the world or its pleasures distract you or lull you into a false sense of security. Be alert! Be vigilant! Pray to escape the wrath that is coming so that you might be among the saved! Stand firm!

These are words we need to hear today. We may shout encouragement from the sidelines, but God is doing more than that. God is pushing us, coaxing us, discipling us, disciplining us, all work to move us towards Himself. He's not just a coach or a mentor. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, He is changing us and making us into His own people. God tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God has given us His very word so that we hear it and put it into practice and journey ever further down the narrow path to eternal life. We participate in the work the Holy Spirit is doing and either spur it along or slow its progress.

Our challenge today then is to seek instruction. We like our own paths. We don't like being told we're wrong. How many people read the manuals to their cars or their DVD players? That's why we've got so many bad drivers and clocks forever flashing 12:00am! God is telling us what to do to stay on the path where Jesus leads. He's shown us the way to go. If God is showing us His love through loving encouragement and training, then the way we respect Him is to humble ourselves and put that guidance to good use.

The truth of apocalyptic passages is always the same, no matter what signs or wonders or horrors they describe. The end is near. Our end is closer to us than we want to admit. Whether anyone here sees the end of time while on this earth is totally in God's hands, but most of us will meet God far sooner than that. When Jesus says that "this generation will not pass away before all this happens," He's not talking about a literal forty-year generation. When Jesus talked about "this generation," He was always talking about how the people of His time were known for their wickedness and their lack of desire to know God. Things haven't changed; the world continues to rebuke God and deny Him His rightful place. There will someday be a new generation, a new people – a people who follow God wholeheartedly, who God has remade into His own image. We are that generation; we are those people...we are not fully there yet, but God intends to complete His task in us so that we might reflect His holiness in all we are and all we do.

On this Mother's Day, as we thank our moms for who they are to us and for their loving care, let's reflect too on the Heavenly Father who gave us our moms. Let's reflect on the words Jesus shared with His disciples. When we do that, when we turn to Him to forgive our sins and cleanse us from unrighteousness, when we are alert and vigilant to the times so we are prepared to stand before the Son of Man when the last day comes, we will truly honor our mothers and fathers.

