

Prophecy Matters!

Luke 21:34-38

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for April 28, 2024

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When Jesus teaches His disciples in Luke 21, He knows He is just days away from betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. So, what He chooses to tell His disciples is remarkably important in these final moments together. Jesus offers eternal encouragement to His audience, and generations of believers to follow, about the end times and the eternal security of believers. We can be assured that the kingdom of God wins eternally, no matter how dark it may temporarily seem here on earth.

Six hundred years before the birth of Christ, a fable was crafted that over time became a favorite bedtime story parents would tell their children.

It was about Chicken Little who was eating lunch one afternoon and when an acorn dropped on her head, she panicked and assumed the world was ending. She ran around the barnyard chirping, “The sky is falling!”

She got all her friends upset with the news—friends with names you might remember from your childhood like Henny Penny and Turkey Lurkey.

Eventually, Foxy Loxy came along and promised to keep all the animals safe from the sky falling on their heads, but of course, he had other plans. He tricked them and cornered them and then ate them all up, except for Chicken Little, who barely escaped with her life.

Now how are kids supposed to sleep after that?

As far as the world is concerned, the mention that Jesus will one day descend from the sky and come down to reign on earth, well, that sounds like some Chicken Little legend to them.

But that’s exactly what Jesus preached in His final sermon on the Mount of Olives—the Mount Olivet Discourse, as it is called.

Over the past several weeks, we’ve been listening in as Jesus delivered this final message recorded for us in Luke 21, which is where I want to return with you.

In our last study, Jesus described the coming tribulation. In **verse 25**, He talked about signs in the sun and moon and stars. He talked about the distress of nations who are perplexed with all the cosmic disturbances. In **verse 26**, he talked about people literally fainting away with fear and foreboding because of all that was happening on planet Earth.

Jesus prophesied about ***the roaring of the waves***, a reference, no doubt, to the tsunamis created by these mega earthquakes that He also prophesied earlier in the chapter at **verse 11 when He predicted:**

“There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”

Luke 21:11

This is all a description of the tribulation period.

Jesus says here in verse 28:

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

Luke 21:28

He’s not talking about the Rapture; that’s already taken place prior to these tribulation disasters on earth.

In fact, down here in verse 31, He clarifies what this redemption is referring to here. He says:

“When you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”

Luke 21:31

In other words, the seven-year tribulation is nearing the end and the descent of Jesus from heaven takes place in a demonstration of His ***power and glory***, He says here in verse 27.

Revelation 19-20 tell us that He will set up his thousand-year kingdom on earth, following the judgment of the nations and the unbelieving world.

Now it might seem odd that Jesus is delivering this news to His disciples as if they are going to experience it.

There are well-meaning Christians who believe that Christians are going to go through the tribulation because Jesus is talking here to believers.

And He's speaking to them as if they're going to experience it. ***"When you see these things taking place, the kingdom of God is near."***

Why would Jesus warn believers of the coming wrath of God during the tribulation if they're going to be raptured prior to the tribulation? Why would He warn His disciples about something they won't experience?

That's a good question!

It's interesting that there are many times in Scripture where you find this happening.

The apostle Peter warned his readers in **2 Peter 3** that God was going to burn up the earth and the universe and create a new one, but that isn't going to happen until the end of the Millennial Kingdom.

Isaiah warned his readers that they would suffer through the Babylonian captivity; but that didn't happen until years after his generation had died.

In like manner, these biblical warnings from Jesus that relate to the coming tribulation and then His return to earth to reign, they are prophetic warnings that should impact the way every generation of believer should live.

And keep in mind the fact that the Bible is going to be studied during the tribulation period probably more intensely than it has ever been studied before.

There will be millions of people—representing every tongue, tribe, and nation—who will come to faith in Christ after the rapture and during the tribulation, and they're going to study prophecy like never before.

They will study Luke 21 longer than we have—I know that's hard to believe!

And they are going to be able to read about these events and gain tremendous insight about what might be happening next, and how it's all part of God's plan for preparing Israel for the coming kingdom.

It'll also inform them that the tribulation is only going to last for seven years and at the end of it, Satan loses.

It will be incredibly encouraging for believers during the tribulation to have the Book of Revelation, Luke 21, Matthew 24-25, the Books of Daniel, and Ezekiel, and Zechariah, and Isaiah, and so much more.

Let me tell you, we have an interest in prophecy today, but it'll be nothing like the interest believers will have during the tribulation when these signs are taking place.

It's sort of like my attitude while flying on an airplane. In fact, the last time Marsha and I were on an airplane together, the flight attendant began going through that pre-flight instruction speech and encouraging us to take out that laminated card. I'm looking out the window and checking my phone.

I turned to talk to Marsha, and she shook her head and whispered, "I'm listening to her, and you should be listening too." Marsha's got the laminated card out; she's listening and following along. I'm looking out the window.

But let me tell you, if all of a sudden one of the engines on that plane caught on fire, and the plane started going down, the first thing I'd do is pull out that card. And I'll start reading it like you can't imagine.

Luke 21 is one of those laminated cards; it tells you how prophecy matters today, even long-term prophecy matters today.

And that's exactly what Jesus does here. He wraps up His sermon by making an immediate application. He effectively says: "Here's how I want you to live as a result of what I've just told you."

And I want to boil these verses down to the simplest outline possible. Here's the laminated card for end-times living. They come as three reminders, here they are:

- Keep on Living Right
- Keep on Looking Ahead
- Keep on Living for Others

It doesn't get any simpler than that.

Now first:

Keep on Living Right

Notice verse 34:

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth."

Luke 21:34-35

Now, in this context, Jesus is talking about believers living during the tribulation period, prior to the return of Christ and His worldwide rule and reign.

But this kind of living can apply to every believer in every generation.

In fact, you can find this same exhortation to “be alert,” to “watch out” in other passages of Scripture.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 16:13:

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith.

1 Corinthians 16:13

Paul writes to the Galatians:

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Galatians 6:1

The apostle Peter describes the coming judgment of God in dissolving the earth and universe at the end of the millennial kingdom in a fiery display of final judgment. This all follows the Great White Throne Judgment of **Revelation 20**.

Then, we’re told in **Revelation 21** that God will create a new earth and new heavens—a new universe. I believe it will be a demonstration of Genesis 1 all over again, only this time we get to watch it happen.

Now in light of the dissolving of earth and the universe by fire, Peter goes on to write this in **2 Peter 3:**

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for ... the coming of the day of God ... the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

2 Peter 3:11-12

Get this: a fiery explosion of the universe isn’t going to happen until the end of the millennial kingdom, which is more than a thousand years from now, if the Lord raptured the church today!

But Peter effectively says, even though that event is going to happen *in the future*, it should change the way you live *in the present*.

Paul writes to Timothy and says:

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Timothy 4:16

Paul isn't talking about saving your soul; he's talking about not wasting your life.

So, prophecy should motivate us to live lives of holiness and godliness and fruitfulness today.

Now, notice carefully what Jesus says here in Luke 21: He's warning us, not about three sins, but about three kinds of lifestyles to avoid. He says here in **verse 34** again:

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, ..."

Luke 21:34

Dissipation is a word for wasted living. It's a rare word in the New Testament, but in Paul's day, it originally referred to what we would call today a hangover.

Someone with a hangover is unable to think clearly; they're foggy and tired and basically want to be left alone.

Today we would say *"that person is wasted,"* and that's not too far off the mark because **dissipation** is the wasting of someone's life.

Jesus is warning someone of living that kind of useless life that's not profitable for themselves, or for anyone else.

One New Testament scholar wrote that dissipation is a life that is preoccupied with lesser things.

Dale Ralph Davis, [Luke: The Year of the Lord's Favor](#) (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 156

Preoccupation with trivial things.

I remember my seminary professor, Howard Hendricks, telling us in class about his neighbor. Hendricks pulled up in the driveway and his neighbor was next door waxing his boat. Nothing wrong with that, Hendricks said, but it was this man's preoccupation in life. His neighbor looked over at him and yelled, "This is the 37th coat of wax on my boat." Hendricks told us, "I smiled and waved; I didn't get on to him. I'm trying to reach him; I didn't lecture him or berate him. I happened to know that *waxing his boat was simply the anesthetic he hoped would dull the pain of an empty life.*"

The next lifestyle to avoid, Jesus says here, is **drunkenness**.

Excessive drinking which leads to ruin is a lifestyle to be avoided.

And let me state the obvious: the best way to avoid the trap of drunkenness is to stop drinking, or never start drinking in the first place.

In Paul's day, there were very few safe options of things to drink. Water was typically contaminated; they lacked refrigeration; wine was often nothing more than fermented water designed to kill the parasites.

But today, we have a thousand options of things to drink. And most of them won't harm you, or cause you to harm others, or cause you to harm your testimony before others.

As I tell my pastoral students at Shepherds Seminary, after nearly 38 years in ministry, I have never once had to apologize to somebody for *not* drinking. But I can tell you that, over 38 years, I have watched one church leader after another, one believer after another, get snared in what Jesus calls here a dangerous trap.

Now with that, the Lord refers to a third lifestyle: a lifestyle of worry. He mentions here ***"hearts weighed down with the cares of this life."***

It might seem surprising that Jesus puts worry in the same category as drunkenness; but it is equally deadly to your spiritual vitality and joy.

Drunkenness is evidence that your life is out of control; worry is evidence that you want to be in control, but there's something in your life you can't control and that begins to consume you. It weighs down, Jesus says, your heart.

Can these three lifestyles entrap believers? Jesus happens to be delivering these three pitfalls, these three warnings, to His disciples. These aren't people on the sidelines. These are dedicated followers.

J.C. Ryle wrote on this verse more than 100 years ago that if Jesus was warning Peter, James, John, and the other apostles—who had already given up everything for Christ—that they needed to remain watchful and avoid these pitfalls, that they too faced the peril of wasting their lives, this exhortation is certainly for the rest of us today.

Adapted from J.C. Ryle, [Expository Notes on the Gospels: Luke](#) (Evangelical Press, original: 1879; reprint: 1975), p. 337

So, here's the first point of application from this message on prophecy from the Lord:
Keep on living right.

Now secondly:

Keep on Looking Ahead

Jesus says here in verse 36:

“But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Luke 21:36

Standing before the Son of Man, in this immediate context, is the judgment following the tribulation where believers are gathered into the kingdom era and unbelievers are judged (**Matthew 25**).

But again, the idea of being brought to stand before the Lord reminds believers today of our coming appointment with Christ.

We will stand before Him at the Bema seat—uniquely for believers only—not to be condemned, but to be commended for all that we did in honor of Him (**2 Corinthians 5**).

The Lord is encouraging us here to pray for spiritual protection in our testimony as we serve Him.

Jesus taught us in the Disciples’ Prayer to pray to be rescued from the tempter on a daily basis, to avoid the snares of the evil one. That’s nothing more than an admission that we need help every day. We need the Lord’s strength to escape the schemes of the devil.

Satan can’t destroy your soul but he wants to destroy your testimony, your integrity and your joyful spirit in the Lord.

So, this warning keeps our feet on realistic ground; we are to stay alert, to watch out, to keep praying in dependence on Christ.

Again, J.C. Ryle put it this way: “We are to remember that evil is around us and near us and *in* us; we must battle daily with an ensnaring world, a busy devil and our own treacherous hearts.”

Adapted from Ryle, p. 339

So don’t coast. Don’t rest on past victories. Don’t polish the trophies of earlier acts of faith; but keep pressing on. Keep looking ahead to that day when the battle is over.

And while you’re waiting for that day to arrive, here’s the final point of application from the Lord’s closing words. Third:

Keep on Living for Others

The sermon is over now, but Luke adds this footnote here in verses 37-38:

And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

Luke 21:37-38

This is another way of saying, Jesus taught them from morning until evening.

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 837

Think about it: Jesus is within hours now of being arrested, beaten, rejected, mocked and crucified. **Three verses** from now, **Judas** will be bargaining to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

But in spite of incredible pressure and mounting sorrow, in spite of knowing that this crowd—these eager faces that are drinking in everything He’s teaching—will soon curse Him and mock Him and call for His death, in spite of it all, Jesus is still teaching them, investing in them, and serving them. Some will believe in Him.

Are you experiencing pressure today?

Is there sorrow in your heart today?

Is your heart weighed down today?

Are you anxious about things that seem beyond your control today?

It could be no more than what Jesus experienced here.

But look at Him. From early morning until the setting of the sun, He is giving, teaching, serving, and investing in the hearts and lives of others.

How’d He do it? I believe **Hebrews 12:2** answers it: “**Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**”

He was looking ahead. He was looking ahead!

Prophecy promotes purity in our lives, and it creates comfort in our hearts.

When the apostle Paul finished describing the rapture of the church, the next event on the prophetic calendar, he finished by saying, “**Therefore, comfort one another with these words.**”

Comfort one another with these words. He did not write, *Therefore terrify one another with these words*. No, **comfort one another**.

We have this incredibly blessed anticipation, the soon appearing Messiah, the imminent return of Christ for His completed church.

Prophecy isn't intended to produce fear, but let me tell you, it will in the heart of every unbeliever.

Our world today would rather believe in *the possibility* of an alien invasion that will wreak havoc on the human race rather than consider *the possibility* of the return of Christ and the judgment of Creator God.

They'd rather face anything and anyone but Him.

My friend, if you're here today without faith in Christ, while I've been preaching this text, it hasn't felt comforting at all, has it?

And I know what that feels like, because I can remember as an unbelieving teenager the conviction and fear that I felt as I knew in my heart that I was rejecting Christ.

As I was studying this text, I remembered when I was around 16-years-old, our school decided to show a brand-new movie produced by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. If I remember correctly, it was called "Thief in the Night." Maybe you remember that terrifying movie.

It was a movie about young people who'd been left behind after Jesus raptured the church; their parents, some of their friends and church members were gone.

I couldn't sleep for a month. There was nothing comforting in that at all.

But there can be comfort, and peace. You and I receive that when we place our faith in Christ and admit our sin and believe His Word.

Prophecy matters to us, more than ever.

But the ultimate reason we love prophecy and study chapters like Luke 21 so carefully is because it ultimately exalts the victory and supremacy of Christ.

Listen, if you forget everything else we've studied over these last several weeks, if you forget the details about whether you're pre-tribulation, or mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation doctrinally, you don't know if you're pre-millennial, or post-millennial, or amillennial, maybe you don't even know what these terms mean.

Let me tell you, what you must know is that you are saved, that you've been redeemed by the Savior and then remember this—**the overriding summation of prophetic Scripture**—Jesus wins; Jesus Christ will reign on earth; Jesus Christ will rule the nations; Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; Jesus Christ wins.

He wins.

So, in the meantime, remember this too, beloved: we're not looking for signs. There are no signs for the rapture; it's imminent. Nothing is in the way.

It could have happened 500 years ago; it could happen 5 minutes from now.

We're not looking for signs. The signs are going to take place in the tribulation period to signal the Lord's soon return to earth with us.

So don't buy any more books or listen to podcasts about blood moons or solar eclipses or ashes from red heifers.

As the old evangelist Vance Havner used to say, "We're not looking for signs, we're listening for a sound."

Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Courageous (Victor Books, 1989), p. 103

I agree.

We're listening for the sound of the trumpet, and away we will go.

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Study Guide

Sermon Summary

The essence of prophecy is not to instill fear but to foster a lifestyle of righteousness, vigilance, and altruism, aligning our actions with the imminent return of Christ.

The call to "Keep on Living Right" is a call to vigilance and moral integrity. Jesus warns against the perils of dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life, which can ensnare even the most devout believers. These warnings serve as a reminder that our daily conduct must be in constant alignment with God's expectations, not merely to avoid spiritual pitfalls but to actively cultivate a life of purpose and witness.

Moving forward, the exhortation to "Keep on Looking Ahead" is rooted in the scriptural mandate to remain spiritually awake and prayerful. This forward-looking mindset is crucial as it empowers us to withstand the trials and tribulations of life with the assurance of Christ's ultimate victory.

Lastly, the directive to "Keep on Living for Others" encapsulates the essence of Christ-like servitude. Even in the face of personal trials and societal rejection, Jesus continued to teach, serve, and invest in the lives of others. His example is a powerful testament to the strength derived from a life lived for others, motivated by the joy set before Him.

These teachings are not just future-oriented but are intensely practical for our daily lives. They call us to a higher standard of living, a more committed stance of readiness, and a more profound commitment to community and service.

Key Takeaways

1. Living rightly is an active, daily pursuit that involves vigilance against sin.
2. The future reality of standing before Christ should shape our present reality.
3. Emulating Christ's example of selfless service, even in the face of personal suffering, challenges us to look beyond our circumstances and invest in the lives of others.
4. Understanding prophecy should lead to a holistic transformation in how we live, look ahead, and interact with others.
5. The urgency of Christ's return and the realities of prophecy should intensify our commitment to the gospel.

Discussion Guide

Bible Reading:

- Luke 21:34-36
- Hebrews 12:2

Observation Questions:

1. What are the specific dangers mentioned in Luke 21:34 that believers are warned to watch out for?
2. How does Luke 21:36 suggest believers should prepare for future challenges and the return of Christ?
3. What does Hebrews 12:2 reveal about the motivation behind Jesus' endurance through suffering?

Interpretation Questions:

1. In what ways might "dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life" impact a believer's readiness for Christ's return according to Luke 21:34?
2. What does it mean to "stay awake at all times" spiritually, and how does prayer contribute to this state as suggested in Luke 21:36?
3. How can the example of Jesus enduring the cross for the joy set before Him in Hebrews 12:2 inspire believers today?

Application Questions:

1. Reflect on the past week: Can you identify a moment when you felt your heart weighed down by "the cares of this life"? What specific step can you take to guard against this in the coming week?
2. Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him. Identify a current challenge or hardship you are facing. What is one way you can shift your focus to the joy and hope in Christ to help you endure this challenge?
3. Think about your daily interactions. What is one specific way you can demonstrate vigilance against sin and distraction, showing readiness for Christ's return, in your workplace or home?
4. Who in your community appears burdened by the cares of life? Plan a specific way you can reach out to them this week to offer support or spiritual encouragement.