

## BE ALWAYS ON THE WATCH

Luke 21:1-38

Key Verse 21:36

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.

**First, “The widow’s two copper coins” (1-4).** Look at verses 1 through 4. As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” Actually, when Jesus saw these people bringing offering to the temple, he could have kept silent, because no matter what, at least, they tried to show their love and worship to God with offerings. Surely, rich people bring their offerings to God out of their wealth—simply, they have a lot of money. No one is happy to be compared to others. Why should Jesus make an issue of their offering, comparing it to the offering of the widow?

This passage is not unrelated to the previous passage where Jesus wept over the Jerusalem temple – outwardly, it seemed that people were worshiping God, but inwardly, they were corrupt only to invite terrible judgment. Also, this passage is not unrelated to chapter 20, where all those religious leaders came up with twisted mind to trap Jesus. The Jews had a form of worship; they had a well established and organized worship system at the gorgeous Jerusalem temple. But their hearts were far from God, inviting God’s wrath on them. Now these rich people seemed doing okay as they brought a lot of offering to God’s temple, but in Jesus’ eyes, it was a heartless action – just a religious practice. Jesus would not tolerate an empty action of worship; he wanted to show them how they must worship and serve God. Then, the poor widow’s offering was a good example for them to learn from.

Two copper coins were called, “a farthing,” worth a quarter of penny. They divided a coin into eight for the poor. In modern currency, if we consider the size of modern day economy, it may be compared to \$5 or \$10 – it was all she had to live on. In those days, the widows had no means to support themselves – no proper job for them to make money. Mostly, they relied on others’ help or begging or if they were lucky, they worked on others’ fields and picked up gleanings. Two copper coins were all she had earned so far, and all she had to live on, but as she attended worship service in the temple, she put them all in the temple treasury. Her action proved her hot love for God; she was not a mediocre; to her, believing in God was an all-or-nothing deal, and in loving and serving God, she was wholehearted; to her worshiping God was the most important thing. Jesus was impressed by her act of worship, and he commended her. He wanted all others, rich believers,

would do the same thing – they would love and worship God with such hot love and devotion.

**Second, “Signs of the end of the age” (5-26).** Look at verse 5. Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. They were Galilean country boys, and the Jerusalem temple was really gorgeous. When Herod the Great, an Idumean, became king in Israel, in order to earn the Jews’ hearts for him, he built the temple and gave it to the Jews. The building project took about 46 years, but still was not complete. The temple was about 500 yard long and 300 yard wide. The temple was the pride of the Jews. Modern archeology found that the stones that were used for the temple were even 10 meters long weighing about 50 tons. This huge temple was at the center of Jerusalem, elevated high above all other constructions. The historian Josephus describes, “...and the wall itself (surrounding the Temple) was the greatest ever heard of by man.” The disciples, so impressed, shouted, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” (Mk 13:1)

But Jesus was not impressed at all. Instead, he 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.” Jesus’ response must have been a cold shower to them. According to Jesus’ words, in AD 70, the Roman General Titus captured the city, and destroyed everything in it, including the temple. At that time, there was a rumor that treasures were hidden among the stones of the walls that the Roman soldiers literally pulled down every stone. The disciples saw the outward glory of the temple and were impressed; but Jesus saw the inner corruption of the people there, and prophesied God’s judgment on them. Israel’s failure, despite their desire for God and their daily religious life, makes us think a lot about how we must live before God. What God desires is not a religious people or a religious life, but people who really love God and honor God.

America is known as a Christian country. But it is nonsense that in America, liberal Christianity that does not believe in Jesus’ resurrection, or God’s creation in six days or Jesus’ virgin birth, is the main stream. Now churches open their doors to the sin of the world in the name of love and tolerance; as a result, there is no word such as repentance or self-denial or fight against sin in the Christian’s life. What would Jesus do if he were here? Would he be impressed because so many people profess their faith in him, saying, “I believe in Jesus”? Jesus says in Mark’s gospel, “Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” (Mk 13:2)

This word of Jesus must have been shocking to the disciples. They asked him, “Teacher, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” In verses 8 through 36, Jesus gave them his answer about this question. In his answer, Jesus shows us what will happen at the end of the age, the signs of the end of the age, and what we must do during this time. So, as we live in the last days of the age, this

passage deserves our full attention and we must hold Jesus' warnings and instructions into our hearts.

Look at verse 8. 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." The first sign of the end time is the appearing of many false messiahs. Wikipedia identifies the list of about 40 people who claimed to be the Messiah. One person claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus. Two people said that they were the reincarnation of Jesus and Buddha. Jesus also mentions here about those who say, 'The time is near.' They claim that by studying the Bible intensively, or by God's divine revelation, they have found the time of Jesus' second coming. 7th Day Adventist church and Jehovah's witness started with this. When the end time is concerned, the first thing Jesus mentioned is not about when it will come, or about what kind of signs there will be, but his warning for the believers not to be deceived by those people who say, 'I am he,' or 'The time is near.' To him, this is the most important matter. The believers must watch out that we are not deceived by those people. Yet, strangely, despite Jesus' warning, so many believers have been deceived by them. Jesus says, "Watch out!" "Do not follow them."

Look at verses 9 and 10. "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.' The second sign of the end of the age is the recurrences of wars and revolutions. Human history is tainted with endless wars. There were World War I and World War II. There have been regional and civil wars. Recently, many Middle East countries experienced revolutions, called Arab Spring – many dictators were deposed, and new governments are established; but instead of having peace, many of those countries are in great turmoil – violence after violence. There are many more wars going on right now around the world in addition to the well-publicized wars in Syria, Turkey, and Afghanistan. International communities are wary of the development of nuclear weapons in Iran and North Korea. When we hear all these things, we wonder and become worried, saying, "What's going to happen next?" But Jesus says, "Do not be frightened! These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

In verse 10, Jesus says, "There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven." In May 12, 2008 in Sichuan, China, there was 7.9 magnitude earthquake and 87,587 people died. In January 12, 2010 in Haiti, there was 7.0 Magnitude earthquake, and 316,000 people died. In March 11, 2011, near the East Coast of Honshu, Japan, there was 9.0 magnitude earthquake and 20,352 people died. Now people keep talking about the big one in California – they say that it will come, and recently, several small earthquakes occurred in Southern California, and we are alarmed. There are also pestilences. AIDS has been devastating the continents of Africa and South Asia. We have heard many strange diseases – SARS (Severe Acute

Respiratory Syndrome), Bird Flu, West Nile Virus, Mad Cow disease and Mouth and Hoop disease. Now Super-bacteria that does not show any good response to antibiotics threatens us. When we hear such bad news, we wonder what is going on. But Jesus predicted that all these things would happen as the sign of the end of the age. Don't be frightened.

Look at verse 12. Let's read this verse together:

“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.”

Before the end comes, there will be a great persecution against Christians; it will be worldwide. Christians will go through hard times. It is everyone's deep seated desire to be recognized and welcomed. No one wants to be rejected, isolated and persecuted. But Jesus says, “You will be betrayed even by your parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me.” When this persecution happens to us, we become sorrowful and depressed. It is painful. But at that time, we must remember what Jesus says in today's passage. Jesus says in verse 19, “By standing firm you will gain life.” In Mark's gospel, Jesus says, “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Jesus does not want us to compromise; instead, he wants us to stand firm in him, no matter what the world may do to us. Jesus also says in verse 13, “This will result in your being witnesses to them,” indicating that persecution happens not by accident, but for a reason that is, believers come to have a chance to preach the gospel to the people of the world. God even wants to use persecution as the means to reach many people with the gospel; for this, He is even willing to send his children to prisons. Indeed, God's desire to look for the lost sheep is great. God is at his work to this very day looking for his sheep and sending his people to them.

Look at verses 20 through 24. In these verses, Jesus told them about the destruction of Jerusalem. According to Jesus' instruction here, on the day when the Roman soldiers surrounded Jerusalem, all believers left the city and thereby, survived. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army in AD 70. In AD 135, the Jews had a war with the Roman Empire again, and 580,000 Jews were killed. After this, the Roman Emperor (Hadrian) issued a decree that the Jews should not stay in Judea any longer, and in an effort to wipe out all memory of the bond between the Jews and the land, he changed the name of the province from Judea to Syria-Palestina; thus, it came to be known as “Palestine,” and since then, all Jews were scattered throughout the earth for the next 1800 years until they returned to their land and rebuilt their nation, “Israel” in 1948.

Here Jesus describes the destruction of Jerusalem as the sign of the end time, indicating that the historic event of the fall of Jerusalem that happened in AD 70, is actually a shadow of the future event. It will happen again in the last days. Revelation talks about this in chapter 16 – the great

number of the army from all nations will gather to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon – the plain of Megiddo, about 50 miles north of Jerusalem, about 20 miles southwest of Galilee. The book of Zechariah also talks about this in chapter 14 – Jerusalem will be under siege, and people will be captured, but the Son of God will come down on the Mount of Olives, and his enemies will be destroyed. Jesus says, “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” (24) The times of the Gentiles means the period of time between Jesus’ ascension and his second coming when the Gentiles enjoy God’s blessing and serve God’s redemption work as main figures. Before the times of the Gentiles, there were the times of the Jews when God worked together with the Jews and proceeded his redemption work starting from Abraham until the fall of Jerusalem. But the Jewish people, even if they had worship service in the gorgeous temple and had a strong sense of identity as God’s chosen people, they refused to serve God’s will as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation; they rejected all God’s servants and even his Son; so finally, God rejected them and, instead, chose the Gentile people as his partners for the world redemption plan. About this, Paul says in Romans 11:25, “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.” It was a painful moment when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed until only its western wall, known as the Wailing Wall, remains, and in its place the Muslims built their mosque, called the Dome of the Rock. Since then, God’s redemption work shifted from the Jews to the Gentiles. Thus, the times of the Gentiles began. As God had chosen Israel and given her the privilege of being a priestly nation through the Jerusalem Temple, now God chose the Christians and gave us the privilege and responsibility to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation through his Son Jesus, who is the true Living Temple. Now the times of the Gentiles are going on, and it is our privilege and responsibility to bring the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth until the full number of the elect is brought back to God. Then, the end will come.

Look at verses 25 and 26. Let’s read these verses together:

<sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

During the end time, the sun, moon and stars will go off their orbits, and asteroids will fall on the earth. As the result of the sun, moon and stars shifting off, due to the change of the gravitation, there will be great tsunamis on the earth; tsunamis so high, higher than 200 feet, and destroying many cities; this will happen in various areas of the earth and many cities will be gone in one day – maybe, Los Angeles, New York,... When these things happen, all nations will be in anguish and great perplexity.

**Third, “The Son of Man is coming in a cloud with power and**

**great glory” (27-38).** Look at verses 27 and 28. Let’s read these verses together:

<sup>27</sup>At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup>When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

As all these signs appear and intensify, Jesus will come in a cloud with power and great glory. The key characteristics of Jesus’ second coming are “They will see,” and “with power and great glory.” When our Lord Jesus came to this world first, he came as a baby in a manger. Only a few people came to worship him: the shepherds and the Magi from the east. But when he comes again, his coming will be noticed globally. He will come in a cloud with power and great glory to rescue us from utter destruction and usher us into his eternal kingdom. His coming will be visible to all people. Revelation 1:7 says, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.” Jesus’ coming will be a universal event that not only the people in the world, but also those who are dead in their graves will see him coming. The prophet Zechariah also wrote about Jesus’ coming: “On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.” (Zech 12:9-10) Under the attack, there will be a great nationwide repentance movement in Israel. On that day, the feet of Jesus will touch the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half of the mountain moving south. (Zech 14:1-4) As Jesus comes again, all his enemies will be destroyed and this present world will be concluded, and the new era will start. Israel will be restored as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and all nations will stream to Zion, saying, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways.” (Isa 2:3) The prophecies of the Old Testaments in regard to the glory of Israel will be fulfilled.

Look at verse 28. Let’s read this verse together:

When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

The end time will be a very difficult time for all peoples on earth. It will be more so for the believers, because, on top of all those challenging things, Christians will be despised, humiliated, and persecuted; all men will hate them. But then, as these end time signs begin to appear, it will be clear to everyone of who was right and who was wrong. As the end time proceeds, as more signs of the end time appear, Christians can be really bold and confident, because they can see that everything is going on according to

God's words in the Bible, and that the time of Jesus' coming is very near. Then, out of confidence and the sense of victory, they can rise and preach the gospel freely, saying, "This is what I have told you all the time. You must repent and believe in Jesus. Follow me, and I will show you the way of life." The end time is the time when we Christians really rise as victors. We will pick up such spirit; we will be really bold. In those days, we will reap a great harvest – every day, hundreds of people. The end time will be the time of great harvest for all Christians.

Look at verses 29 through 32. "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.'" How do we know that Jesus is coming again? We know this because, that's what the Bible says like today's passage, and the signs Jesus told us about are appearing now. Things are going on according to what he said, and eventually, as he said, he will come again. In verse 33, Jesus reassures us of the absolute certainty of his coming, saying, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Just as the promises concerning his first coming were all fulfilled, the promises about his second coming will be fulfilled.

In verses 34 through 36, as a conclusion of his teaching about the end time, Jesus shows us what we must do and how we must live our life as his believers. Look at verses 34 through 36. Let's read these verses together:

<sup>34</sup>"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. <sup>35</sup>For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>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."

Be careful! Christians must be careful of what they do and how they live, because, otherwise, they will find themselves involved in the things of this life so deeply, and thereby, they will not be prepared properly for Jesus' second coming. Many Christians have a casual attitude about his second coming. They are not careful about how they live, what they do and what they pursue in their life, but just assume that great things will happen to them. They too easily say, "I will be raptured and reign with him forever." If they have this glorious vision of rapture and reigning together with Jesus forever, they must prepare themselves properly, being very careful of what they do and how they live, striving to do everything Jesus wants them to do.

"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." Dissipation means "unrestrained indulgence in physical pleasures, esp. alcohol" or "excessive expenditure; wastefulness."

Simply, it is about pleasure seeking life. Christians, be careful of what you do and where you go and how you live your life so that that your heart will not be so weighed down with dissipation. Otherwise, your heart will be weighed down with pleasure-seeking desires and luxuries – your hearts will be enticed by such things and you will think about them and even do many crazy things, and thereby, you end up living your life doing such things, then, at Jesus' second coming, you will be in big trouble.

Drunkenness is alcoholism. There is some pleasure in drinking, and for this small pleasure, people pour out their time, energy and money, and soon, their life, mind, body and soul are all polluted by it. With this concept in mind, we can see that there are so many different types of drunkenness – some people are drunk with alcohol; some others are drunk with video games; some people are drunk with gambling; some people are drunk with lazily surfing on the web, spending tons of time for nothing. As a result, their hearts are weighed down with such things – their whole concern or interest or desire is about them that they fail to prepare themselves for Jesus' second coming. Make sure that this will not happen to you.

The anxieties of life are about what to eat, how to pay the bills, how to secure life, how to support the family, or how to raise children, or how to prepare the retirement plan. Life comes with a lot of responsibilities and duties at school, at work, and at home. Unless, we are really careful and watch out, our hearts can be easily weighed down with the anxieties of life – we will only think and concern about how to take care of our life – what to eat, what to wear, how to buy a house, what kind of job, marriage and family, forgetting about Jesus' coming. Then, that day, the coming of Jesus will close on us unexpectedly like a trap, and we will be ashamed greatly. We need a job; we need to build our career; we need to pay the bills; we need to support our family and take care of our children. But we must be careful that our hearts are not weighed down with these things. We must remember that we are Jesus' disciples, waiting for his second coming, and we must be able to see the signs of the end of the age going on in the world and prepare ourselves properly so that, at his second coming, we may stand before him.

Jesus says, "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." Christians must be always on the watch. Many Christians show a care-free attitude about their life, saying, "I believe in God, so everything will go well." Then, they do whatever they want to do. But Christian life is not a care-free life; we must not live a casual life. Instead, we must be always on the watch of what's going on in the world, and what we do and how we live our life, carefully choosing to obey God's will and purpose, denying ourselves and taking up the cross of mission daily. As we live that kind of life today and tomorrow continually and see those signs appear, we will not be panicking or frightened; instead, recognizing that everything is going on according to God's words, we can dedicate ourselves to God's work all the more. During the end time, while all other people are in great anguish and perplexity because even the heavenly bodies are shaken,

we will remain calm, doing the work of evangelists all the more. In this way, as we are always on the watch and pray, we will be able to escape from all that is about to happen. Then, as we live that kind of life, at Jesus' second coming, we will be able to stand before him.

Jesus says, "that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." This is the goal of our Christian life. This expression also shows that at his second coming, not all people, not even all Christians will be able to stand before him, but only those who have lived their lives in a manner worthy of his coming, just like the first and second servants in the parable of the Mina. Christians, be careful so that your hearts will not be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life. Be always on the watch and pray so that you can stand before Jesus at his second coming.

Look at verses 37 and 38. Let's read these verses together:

<sup>37</sup>Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, <sup>38</sup>and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

After sharing with the disciples about the signs of the end of the age and his glorious coming again, Jesus was neither anxious nor high in spirit. Instead, he taught the Bible at the temple from early morning, and when evening came, he went out to the Mount of Olives and prayed. Now there were only few days left for him to live on earth, but he used all his time and energy in teaching the word of God. Let's follow Jesus' example by giving ourselves fully to teaching the word of God to God's flock on our campuses.

One Word: That You May Be Able To Stand Before The Son Of Man