

## The King Is Coming – Are You Ready? (Luke 20:45-21:38 February 27, 2011)



Then Jesus said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”

Nation will rise against nation.



And kingdom against kingdom.



There will be great earthquakes.



It seems as if Jesus could have been reading from the front page of this week's newspapers.

These words of Jesus come from one of His most famous discourses – the Olivet Discourse. After a month like we have had, many Christians see His words as signs that the Second Coming is now imminent.

Just this week I heard a Christian widow say that she was rejoicing because these events meant that the end is nigh and she will be reunited with her husband very soon.

But is that so?

The Olivet Discourse is not an easy passage. In fact many scholars believe it is among the hardest sections of the Bible to interpret. But I want to suggest that there are two errors Christians fall into regarding Jesus' words regarding His return.

The first is what I call – **over ready**.



Seeing every sign – every war, every earthquake as an indication that the return of Jesus is most certainly imminent.

The second error is what I call – **never ready**.

Disregarding every sign – every war, every earthquake as an indication that the return of Jesus will most certainly occur.

If you have to err – then err on the side of being over ready. But there is a third way to understand these verses.

As a call to be – **ever ready**.

When we look at the words of Jesus we find a balance.

He makes it very clear that He will most certainly return – and the faithful servants are those who are ever ready for His return.

Before we come to this section regarding the return of Jesus – Luke includes a small but important section dealing with the attitude a true disciple should have to wealth.

The section before it had to do with obeying the Son. The section following has to do with making sure you are ready for the Son's return.

One of the great indicators of obedience to the Son – one of the great indicators of readiness for His return is what we do with our wealth.

So we have this small but crucial interlude.

First, He presents the wrong attitude – **self first**:

Luke 20:45–47:

And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

The scribes were meant to be men of God – but they loved wealth and prestige.

They would take the home of a widow on Friday and make a long pious prayer in the synagogue on Saturday.

Their motivation for wealth was self.

Compare that to the right attitude to wealth – **God first**:

Luke 21:1–4:

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you,

this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

The wealthy gave what cost them nothing. The widow gave everything – her next meal – why? – because she was giving to God.

How we spend our money shows what we love and what we serve.

A true disciple puts God first in all things.

It is following this interlude that we come to what is known as the Olivet Discourse. Matthew and Mark both tell us that after Jesus leaves the temple – He makes His way to the Mount of Olives – and there He gives this incredible address.

Look with me at Luke 21:5-6:

And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

When Herod the Great came to power, he was seen as an outsider because he was an Idumean – not a Jew. So he sought to ingratiate himself to the Jews by expanding and beautifying the temple. Work began on the temple in 19 BC and was not finished until 63 AD.

But, by the days of Christ, most of the work was done and once again the temple was a beautiful and imposing structure.

The Babylonian Talmud said:

He that never saw the Temple of Herod never saw a fine building.

The temple was considered one of the wonders of the world of its day.

So as Jesus and the disciples were leaving the temple – someone commented on its beauty.

Jesus’ response was to say for the second time that this incredible temple would be destroyed.

Back in Luke 19 – Jesus had come to Jerusalem in the triumphal entry – but the Pharisees rejected Him as Messiah. Then in verses 41–44 Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

The city rejected her Messiah in the day of His visitation. In Jesus, God Himself came to the temple as foretold in Malachi – and He was rejected. For this there must be judgment.

Ultimately, there will be a final judgment – but before then there will be many small disasters which are meant to remind us of the great judgment to come.

One of the most pointed reminders that judgment for sin is coming was the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Jesus alludes to this when He says the days are coming when this will all be destroyed.

The temple was beautiful. It was solid – made from enormous stones. It must have been hard for the disciples to imagine this beautiful structure – this historic city – all destroyed – so thoroughly destroyed that not one stone would be left on another.

So not surprisingly they wanted to know **when** this would happen. Verse 7:

And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?”

Notice this question – **When these things be?**

Jesus answers this question in the verses that follow. While there are a number of variations on the themes – there are basically three ways Bible scholars have understood Jesus’ answers.



First – as occurring in 70 AD. In 70 AD the Roman General Titus sacked Jerusalem – utterly destroying it.

Many scholars see Jesus’ words as referring exclusively to this event.

9-19 Events leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD  
20-24 The fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD

25-28 The return of Jesus in 70 AD

29-38 So prepare for the return of Jesus in 70 AD

But there are several problems with this view. While the words in Luke 21:20-24 can be read as referring only to what happened in 70 AD – the parallel passages in Matthew and Mark add a few details that don't fit what happened in 70 AD.

For example, in Matthew 24:15, Matthew tells us Jesus said:

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, *standing in the holy place*, **then** let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

In 70 AD, when the army of Titus made it to the temple, no one was permitted to flee. Those who fled, had left before A.D. 68, midway through the siege of Jerusalem. Yet, Jesus implores them to flee after the 'Abomination of Desolation' reaches the temple.

And even harder for this view is the description of the return of Jesus in verses 25-28. Jesus did not literally return in 70 AD. They say that Jesus is implying He returned through the armies of Titus destroying the city. This is a difficult way to interpret those verses about seeing the Son of Man coming on the clouds.

A second way these verses are understood is:



The Second Coming of Jesus at the end of human history.

9-19 Events leading up to the Second Coming (the tribulation)

20-24 The fall of Jerusalem in the tribulation

25-28 The return of Jesus at the Second Coming

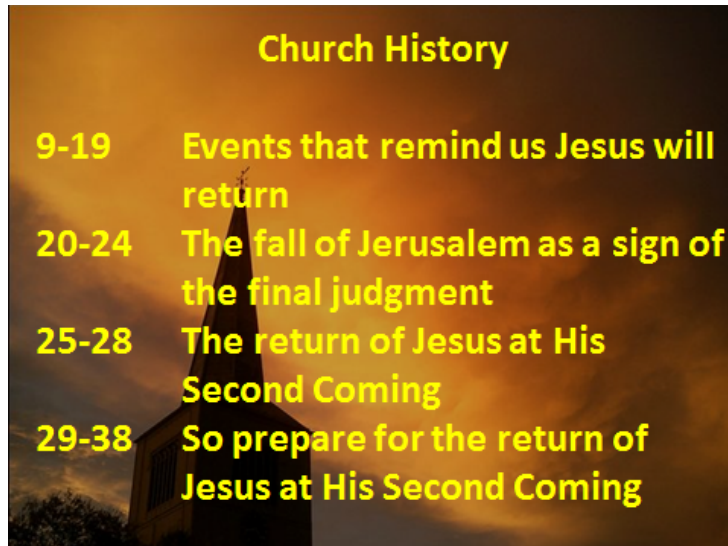
29-38 So prepare for the return of Jesus at His Second Coming

The problems with this view are that Jesus' comments suggest that some who hear His words will see the fall of Jerusalem – and the description of the fall of Jerusalem seems to refer in some ways to 70 AD. But the greatest problem is that these verses



seem to address the whole church – not just a few saints at the very end of history. Jesus says this time stretches from the fall of Jerusalem until the end of the time of the Gentiles.

The third way – and in my mind – without doubt the best way to understand these verses is:



Describing all of Church History

- 9-19 Events that remind us Jesus will return
- 20-24 The falls of Jerusalem – 70 AD and the end
- 25-28 The return of Jesus at the Second Coming
- 29-38 So prepare for the return of Jesus at His Second Coming

Instead of being a message for a few saints at the beginning or end of church history – this is a message for all the saints in every age.

Look at verse 24:

They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

This warning goes from the first fall of Jerusalem until the end.

So this message is for us – and it is as relevant as the events occurring today.

Jesus begins by telling His disciples that there will be false Christs claiming the end is nigh.

Verse 8:

And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them.

Over the centuries there have been hundreds of men claiming to be Christ returned for His people – and many more alluding to being the Messiah.

The first false Christ we know any definite details of was Barchochba in A.D. 132, around a hundred years after the true Messiah.

Since then – we have had many false Christs.

Over the past couple of decades we have had some brazen claims.

On Sunday, April 25, 1982, readers around the world opened their newspapers to discover an unusual full-page advertisement proclaiming this:

The World Has Had Enough ... Of Hunger, Injustice, War. In Answer To Our Call For Help, As World Teacher For All Humanity,

THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE

The advertisement then asks, “Who is the Christ?”

This message of the Christ’s reappearance has been given primarily by such a disciple trained for his task for over 20 years. At the centre of this ‘Spiritual Hierarchy’ stands the World Teacher, Lord Maitreya, known by Christians as the Christ. ...His presence in the world guarantees there will be no third World War.

The article later asks the question, “When will we see Him?”

He has not yet declared His true status, and His location is known only to a very few disciples. One of these has announced that soon the Christ will acknowledge His identity and within the next two months will speak to humanity through a worldwide television and radio broadcast. His message will be heard inwardly, telepathically, by all people in their own language. From that time, with His help, we will build a new world.

Of course – no telepathic message ever happened.

But every false Christ puts men on edge wondering – is this the end?

Later in this discourse – Jesus makes it clear – when He returns no one will wonder if He has returned – everyone on earth will know with certainty.

You will know when the end has come – no one will miss it.

So what will the period from His first coming to his second coming be like?

First:

9-19 Events that remind us Jesus will return



Verse 9:

And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.

Every war – every earthquake – every disaster – makes some believers think the end is at hand.

This has been a bad year. We are not yet two months in. We have had floods, cyclones, earthquakes, half the Middle East is at war – no wonder some are asking – is this the end?

Jesus says – these type of events must come before the end – but they are not the end. Mark 13:8 – Jesus says they are birth pangs of the end.

Verses 10-11:

Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”

Jesus knows what the world is like and will be like until the end. This is a fallen world. Bad things happen. The creation groans under the effects of sin.

Men kill, nature destroys, accidents happen.

It is estimated that on any given day between 15 and 30 wars are raging around the world and more than a third of the world’s population live in lands affected by war.

Can you think of a news broadcast you have seen that didn’t mention some war in some land?

Earthquakes of some size happen daily. At any time some nation is in the grip of famine and pestilence. There are signs in the heavens.

These things *must* happen – because of the sin of Adam – but even sever disasters do not mean the end is at hand.

It does mean the end will come – the One who will end the cycle of violence and disasters will come. Jesus says – let them remind you that He will come to end the effects of sin – and remember that He will come in a final judgment that will make very birth pang pale in comparison.

But that day is not yet. Verse 12:

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to

answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

In the Upper Room discourse – Jesus said that we will be hated by all. Why? Because the world hates Him.

He told them they were sinners who need a Saviour and they killed Him. Now He says – they will hate you too. Even the churches and synagogues will persecute us if we proclaim the truth with accuracy and power.

But don't fret – see this as an opportunity to bear witness.

When the earthquake hits take the opportunity to share. As Jesus used the tragedies of Pilate's massacre and the tower of Siloam to call for repentance – so too must we call for repentance. Tragedies make men and women open to the truth. They think about eternity. They see their own mortality. They ask – Why? And we have the answers.

If you are persecuted – take the opportunity to share Christ.

The Lord will tell us what to say and how to respond when the day comes.

We might die – but we will not perish eternally – instead we will gain our lives.

Consider Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London and Hugh Latimer Bishop of Worcester who were burned at the stake in Oxford. Their crime was to reject the Romish doctrine concerning the mass.

Their death warrant outlined three charges against them.

1. That they rejected the notion that the bread and wine became the physical body of Christ.
2. That they maintained that the sacrament remained bread and wine.
3. That they rejected the concept that the mass was a resacrifice for the living and the dead.

For this they were imprisoned and pressed to recant of their faith in Christ and return to the fold of Rome.

They did not. The date for their execution was set at the sixteenth of October, 1555. They invited friends to come and witness their 'marriage,' for they were about to go to the marriage supper of the lamb.

As he was tied to the stake, Ridley cried out:

Oh heavenly Father, I give unto Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast called me to be a professor of Thee, even unto death. I beseech Thee Lord God, have mercy on this realm of England, and deliver it from all her enemies.

As the faggots were being lighted, Latimer spoke:

Be of good comfort Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.

In that hour, they were given what to speak by the Spirit of God.

We might not be burned at the stake – but not one person goes through this life unscathed.

Floods, car crashes, illnesses, deaths – there is tribulation in this life – why because this is a fallen world.

When we see floods, cyclones, earthquakes, wars – we should long for the return of Jesus – we should cry out – How long O Lord – we should tell people that Jesus is coming to end this fallen world – and tell them to repent and escape.

Then Jesus focuses on one event – an event that caused Israel enormous pain – verses 20-24:

The fall of Jerusalem as a sign of the final judgment

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The Jewish historian Josephus left us a very accurate account of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Zealot Jewish forces who were trying to free Israel from the yoke of Rome won an impressive victory over the Twelfth Legion in November of 66 A.D. But, this merely goaded the Romans into deciding to eradicate Jerusalem.

When the Roman legions approached – many in the city heeded Jesus' words and fled.

Those who did not flee suffered greatly. The latter days of the siege were terrible. The Edomites, the age-old enemy of Israel joined the siege and escalated it. One evening they surrounded the city with 20,000 soldiers. They broke into the city and went directly to the temple. There, they slaughtered 8,500 people by slitting their throats. As the temple flowed with blood, the Edomites rushed madly through the streets of the city plundering houses and murdering everyone they met, including the high priest.

Josephus tells us what the time that followed was like. He said:

The daytime was spent in the shedding of blood, and the night in fear.

It was:

Common to see cities filled with dead bodies.

The city was cut off. Fear grew.

Fathers tearfully slaughtered their own families to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Romans. The siege led to a famine so bad that mothers killed, roasted and ate their own children. Dead bodies were everywhere littering the shores and bloating in the sun. Roman soldiers captured those who attempted to escape and crucified them at the rate of 500 per day.

Initially, Titus gave orders to spare the temple, but when the whole city including the temple was ravaged by fire, he commanded that it be demolished.

Josephus notes that the temple and the city were so thoroughly dug up and destroyed that there was nothing left to make anyone who came later to ever think it had been inhabited let alone that one of the most magnificent buildings had rested there. Only the foundation remained.

The words of Jesus had literally come true.

The Jews had turned away from the one place salvation could be found and they felt the effects of judgment.

By the time it was done over 1.1 million Jews in Palestine were dead and only 97,000 from Jerusalem were left to be taken off into captivity. And throughout the whole empire another million were sent into slavery.

Why did this happen?

Because when Messiah came – they rejected Him and crucified Him. Matthew 27:22-25:

Let Him be crucified! ... His blood be on us and on our children!

The day of vengeance had come.

But note verse 22:

These are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.

God had repeatedly warned His people that their faithlessness to Him would result in judgment against Jerusalem. Leviticus 26:21-33, Deuteronomy 28, 1 Kings 9:6-9 – not to mention Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets.

Crucially, this judgment on Jerusalem did not happen just once.

It happened in 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem. In 167 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated Jerusalem. In 70 A.D. when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. And a number of passages seem to suggest that at some future date at the end of history – Jerusalem will fall again.

If the only record we had of the Olivet Discourse was Luke's – we could think that these verses only spoke of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. But Matthew and Mark have extra details that don't fit the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Also, the book of Daniel has details that seem to indicate a number of fulfilments of the fall of Jerusalem.

The point is this. In 70 AD – Jerusalem fell. Why? Because they had rejected Messiah on the day of His visitation.

The One way to escape judgment had entered the city – proclaimed He was the Saviour – and had been killed.

But as bad as this was – in fact as bad as any war, any disaster is – these are merely warnings that Jesus will return in one final act of judgment that will make every birth pang, every warning sign seem very mild.

The fall of Jerusalem might seem cruel – but it was actually a sign of grace – this was a warning and not the final judgment – there is still time for repentance – here it is called the time of the Gentiles. The Jews rejected their Messiah – and now salvation comes to all men – Jew and Gentile – the age of the church.

And every pain – every death – every injury – every disaster – is meant to remind us – judgment day is coming – repent and be ready.

We have to be ready because Jesus will return. Verses 25-28:

The return of Jesus at the Second Coming

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

The sun, the moon and the stars were a gift to man from the Creator to testify of the grandeur of the Lord. But what did men do? They worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars.

So God showed He was Lord by manipulating the sun, moon and stars at His command. And these signs in the heavens would be signs of judgment – and a reminder of the final judgment.

You can see an example in Isaiah 13 which speaks of the judgment of Babylon by the Medes.

Verses 10-13:

For the stars of heaven and their constellations  
Will not flash forth their light;  
The sun will be dark when it rises,  
And the moon will not shed its light.  
Thus I will punish the world for its evil,  
And the wicked for their iniquity;  
I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud,  
And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.  
I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold,  
And mankind than the gold of Ophir.  
Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble,  
And the earth will be shaken from its place  
At the fury of the Lord of hosts  
In the day of His burning anger.

The judgment on Babylon foreshadows a greater day of reckoning to come. Verse 11 says that it falls on the whole world. Signs in the heavens declared this final judgment would come.

The point is that one day – the final sign will appear. Signs in the heavens – so great people will faint with fear thinking the end has come – but in that day they will be right.

He will appear. The Son of Man coming with glory.

Revelation 1:7 says:

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.

No one will miss the return of the Son of Man. All will know His day has come.

While it is a day for those who reject Him to fear – for those who know Him and long for His return – it is a day to rejoice.

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

This world is filled with persecution, pain, suffering – but it makes us long for the day of Christ. And that day will come. The day our redemption draws near.

And when that day comes we will rejoice. The end of suffering is near. No pain, no tears – just rejoicing in Him.

But, this is only for those who are in Him and have longed for His coming.

Verses 29-38:

So prepare for the return of Jesus at His Second Coming

Luke 21:29–33:

And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

This passage has a great deal of significance for me. In 1985, I was a very young believer and foolishly accepted anything that was preached from the pulpit. One Sunday evening the associate pastor at the church I was in, preached a message based on this text. He said that the fig tree represented Israel and the generation of verse 32 referred to forty years. Israel had officially become a nation in 1948. This was the fig tree putting forth its leaves. That meant that the Lord would return somewhere around 1988.

Jesus did not come back in 1988.

So what is this talking about?

The generation alive at the time of Christ saw the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The wise saw this as a sign that Christ would come back – just as the fig tree putting forth leaves is a sign summer is coming. Earthquakes, floods, wars, the fall of Jerusalem – all are signs that Jesus will return in judgment.

How certain is the return of Jesus? – Heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will not pass away.

So be prepared.

Verses 34-38:

“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. 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.” 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.

It has been 2,000 years since Jesus uttered these words.

Most of the world lives as if He will not come back.

Even many Christians live unprepared for His return.

But every war, every earthquake, every car accident – are meant to remind us that Jesus is coming back – we need to be ready.

Jonathan Edwards wrote this resolution – *Resolved*, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

That is how Jesus wants us to live – live so we will wish we had on that final day.

Don't waste your life in dissipation and drunkenness.

It is so easy to waste our life:

- This is just a busy season of life.
- The hours I spend at work are a necessary evil – it will get better.
- I will get to my quiet time as soon as this deadline is over.
- Once my exams are done, then I will improve my prayer life.
- I *need* a day of rest – church will always be there next week.
- I'm just praying for opportunities to share with them.
- I will get to my son's *next* football game.
- When the kids get bigger and can appreciate it more, I will spend time with them.

We live like Annie:

Tomorrow, tomorrow  
There's always tomorrow  
It's only a step away

Jesus says – be ever ready. Live knowing the day of judgment and redemption will come.

If you die tomorrow, if the end times begin tomorrow – are you ready? That is why Edwards resolved that he would live so, as he should wish he had done when he came to die. Is your life a life of regrets or a no regret life? Is your life a life of 'if only I had my time again?'

You cannot change the days that are gone. Wishing they would change is no good. All you can change are the days to come. Resolve today to be ready for the day you die or the day He comes for you.

In John 9:4 Christ says this:

We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work.

You only have a certain number of todays until night comes and you will never work again. The day when you will be unable to serve the King in this life comes.

When He reached the end of His earthly life Jesus said this in John 17:4:

I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You gave Me to do.

As His death approached He said that He had accomplished the work His heavenly Father gave Him to do.

As His life drew to a close Paul could write this:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.

**Can you say those things?** Are you *honestly* ready to stand in the presence of Him with whom we have to do and say, "I have accomplished the work which You gave me to do. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

Jesus is coming. The events of this year are testimony to the fact He will come.

If you don't know Christ – then let this be the day you repent and come to Him. Speak to me – learn how you can be ready.

If you are in Christ – then no Christian should be surprised when the heavens split and He returns. Jesus keeps sending us warnings that He is coming. Powerful warnings. Earthquakes, floods, deaths.

The question is whether we heeded the warnings and made sure you resolve to live so, you would wish you had done when you come to die.