JESUS’ SECOND COMING

Matthew 24:1-35

Key Verse: 24:30 “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and glory.”

Some people say that human history goes nowhere. They see the world with a negative viewpoint as it is troubled by human wickedness and natural disasters in various places around the world. A few days ago, right after a volcano in Japan exploded, a big earthquake hit Taiwan and killed more than a hundred people. But, we Christians don’t see history with negative viewpoint because we believe in God’s divine control and his sovereignty over human history. History is ‘his story’, which means ‘the story of Jesus.’ Human history does not go nowhere, but proceeds towards Jesus’ second coming. Jesus will come again with power and glory as he promised.

In today’s passage Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple and the signs of the end times. He consummates his prediction with his glorious coming. We call Jesus’ second coming “Parousia” in Greek, which means “coming”, or “appearing.” Let’s learn what will happen to this world before and when Jesus comes again, and what we must do before he comes again.

First, the destruction of the temple (1,2) Look at verses 1. “***Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings***. Jesus’ disciples called Jesus’ attention to the size and beauty of the temple building. According to Mark’s gospel, his disciples said to Jesus, “*Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings*!” (Mk 13:1) According to the historian Josephus, the temple stones were white, and some of them were 37 feet long, 12 feet high and 18 feet wide. The temple front was elaborated and adorned by a huge golden vine, of which a grape cluster size was as tall as a man. The historian described the magnificence of the temple, saying, “Whatever was not overlaid with gold was purest white.” It was not surprising that Jesus’ disciples were very impressed by the beauty and size of the temple.

But Jesus was not moved by the outward appearance of the temple. Jesus saw the corruption of the religious leaders in the temple, and he predicted the destruction of the temple as God’s divine judgment. Look at verse 2. “***Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down***.” Jesus’ prediction about the destruction of the temple was fulfilled in AD 70 when Titus, the Roman general, seized Jerusalem and completely destroyed the temple building. At that time, stones were even pried apart by the Roman soldiers who desired to collect the gold leaf that melted from the roof when the temple was set on fire. Here we learn that we must have spiritual insight to see the spiritual reality behind the glittery things of the world.

What was the disciples’ response to Jesus’ prediction? As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, they came to Jesus privately and asked, “***Tell us when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age***?” (3)According to the book of Daniel in the OT, Daniel saw a vision while he was praying. In his vision the angel Gabriel predicted the destruction of the temple and the end of the age. Daniel 9:26 says, “*After the sixty-two ‘sevens’, the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood*:…” When Jesus’ disciples heard about the destruction of the temple, they thought that the end of this world would follow based on Daniel’s vision.

Second, the signs of the end of the age (4-14) What did Jesus say about the signs of the end of the age? Look at verses 4-7. “***Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.***” The first sign of the end of the age is the appearance of false messiahs and false prophets. Jesus repeated the appearance of the false messiahs and prophets in verses 11 and 23-26. These days there are many false messiahs and prophets who are deceiving people in this world. There are more than 33 self-claimed ‘God’ and 24 self-called ‘Jesus’ in Korea. There were the cult leaders such as Jim Jones and David Koresh who led their followers to mass suicide in 1970s and 1990s in America.

In Paul’s day there were some imposters who deceived the believers in the church of Thessalonica. In his second letter to the saints in the church Paul warned them against the false messiahs and false prophets, saying, “*Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God*.” (2 Thes 2:3,4) Paul also said in 1Timothy 4:1, “*The Spirit clearly says that in latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons*.”

At the end of the age, there will be deceiving people and deceiving spirits. These days there are two kinds of deception: the one who claims himself to be God and the one who claims ourselves to be God. The one who claims himself to be God is a false messiah. The false messiahs are not only cult leaders, but also the things of the world visible or invisible which deceive us to become spiritually blind so that we may fall away from our faith. They are visible and invisible idols. Timothy Keller, New York Times Bestselling author of “*The Reason for God*” said in his book “*Counterfeits of God*”, they are the empty promise of money, sex, and power, and the only hope that matters. These counterfeits of God deceive people by tempting them that they may provide them with perfect satisfaction. But this is Satan’s lie.

The one who claims ourselves to be God is Satan. Satan is a liar and deceiver. In the beginning Satan deceived a woman to disobey God by saying, “You will be like God.” (Ge 3:5) Satan who deceived a woman deceives us even today in the same way, “You are God! You are your own man or woman!” In this post-modernism Satan says that there is no absolute truth. Satan lies through atheistic and relativistic skeptics who say, “Whatever you think is true, that is truth.” One philosophy processor said to his students, “There is no absolute truth in this world.” One of his students challenged him, “Sir! Are you sure of what you said?” The professor abruptly answered, “Yes, what I said is absolutely true!” Satan is a liar and Jesus is the truth. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6) God is truth and what Jesus said is true. May God grant us spiritual insight and discernment to tell the evil and deceiving spirits in this post-modern generation. Amen!

The second sign of the end time is wars and rumors of wars. Look at verses 6-7. After the dissolution of The Cold War for the last few decades this world went through many global and regional wars and conflicts between nation and nation, and between tribe and tribe, such as The Yugoslavia civil war, The Gulf war, the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, the Congo civil war, the Chechen war, the Nigerian civil war, the war against terrorism, the war against ISIS, and on. These days the surge and the increase of the power of ISIS becomes a great threat to the peace of this world. The third sign of the end of the age is horrible and frequent natural disasters around the world such as famines, earthquakes, and plagues. Recently the Zika virus which began in Brazil hit the world and leads people into deep fear and anxiety.

What did Jesus say about all these signs of the end time? He said in verse 8. “***All these are the beginning of birth pains.***” Jesus didn’t see these signs negatively as people worry and fear. He saw them as the beginning of birth pains. A pregnant woman begins to suffer just before she delivers a new baby. In the same way all these horrible signs are birth pains for new world and new life. Jesus saw them as the signs for new beginning. He said that such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Such signs are prerequisite of new beginning for new world.

Jesus added persecution against Christians as a sign of the end of the age. Previous signs are global or local events, but this sign is personal. Look at verses 9-11. “***Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people***.” According to Jesus’ words, persecution comes because of him. Christians will be persecuted and put to death simply because we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Even today many Christians in North Korea, China, and Muslim countries in the Middle East are persecuted and executed because of Jesus. This is not only the story of oversea countries, but of the story in America where we live now. There are more increasing persecutions and discriminations against Christians. People replaced “Merry Christmas” with “Happy Holiday.” If a Christian shares his opinion against the same sex marriage, he may be arrested as hate crime. These days Rev. Franklin Graham, the son of Rev. Billy Graham, raises his voice against the moral corruption and spiritual degeneration of this country. In the Internet there are flood of anti-Christians’ comment against him and against Christianity.

Jesus said that because of the persecution many Christians will turn away from their faith and will betray and hate each other. We call this “Apostasy” When people lose their faith in God, they will degenerate into the level of animals. When they have no love of God, they have only hatred, anger, selfishness, fear, and despair. Jesus said in verse 12. “***Because of the increase of the wickedness, the love of most will grow cold***.” When they have no love of God, they become selfish, indifferent, cold, and violent.

What did Jesus say to his believers in the time of tribulation? What must we do as Christians and as the Bible-believing people of God? Look at verse 13. “***but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.***” Jesus promised that the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. The one who keeps their faith to the point of death will be saved. Jesus said in Revelation 2:11. “*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.*” Those who endure persecutions, temptations, and deceptions to the end will be greatly rewarded in heaven. Those who are persecuted, discriminated and even executed because of the name of Jesus will receive the crown of life from our Lord Jesus Christ.

What did Jesus ask his believers to do at the end of the age? Jesus asked them to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. Look at verse 14. “***And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come***.” Jesus promised that the end will not come until the gospel of the kingdom is preached to all nations. These days many churches and missionary organizations around the world work together in order to spread the gospel to the every corner of the world, especially to the area where modern technology and media cannot reach. In fact today more than two thirds of world population can hear the gospel through internet or other sources. In verse 14 Jesus emphasized the importance and urgency of preaching the gospel. Preaching the gospel should be our first priority as followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus eagerly wants to come again to bring his people to his kingdom. Still, he cannot do so because the gospel is not yet preached to all nations.

Third, the fall of Jerusalem (15-21) In verses 15-21 Jesus predicts the fall of Jerusalem. His prediction was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman soldiers under Titus invaded Jerusalem. At that time, more than a million Jews were killed including pregnant women and nursing mothers. How horrible and painful tragedy it would be! Look at verses 15-21. “***So when you see standing in the holy place’ the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel- let the reader understand- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now- and never to be equaled again***.” Jesus quoted the book of Daniel in order to explain the horrible situation at the time of fall of Jerusalem. (Da 8:13, 9:27,11:31,12:11) The words “the abomination that causes desolation” in Daniel 11:31 was fulfilled in BC 168 when the Greek king, Antiochus Epiphanes, erected an altar to Zeus over the altar of burned offering in the temple by sacrificing a swine on it. The Jews hated pig as an unclean animal. Sacrificing a pig in the holy temple was the capital offense to the Jews as Daniel prophesied, “the abomination that causes desolation.” At the time of fall of Jerusalem people in the city must flee to the mountains as Lot was told to escape to the mountain when God punished the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those who turn back in order to get something from their house will lose their salvation. Remember Lot’s wife! (Ge 19:26, Lk 17:32) Jesus predicts horrible massacres and painful tragedy in Jerusalem. The pain and suffering which people would go through cannot be compared to others.

Fourth, the glorious second coming of Jesus (22-34)The second coming of Jesus Christ is the climax of this passage and culmination of the end of the age. This is the day of victory to those who stand firm to the end, and this is the day of glory to those who have waited and welcomed Jesus’ second coming. In verses 27-29 Jesus explains what is going to happen just before he comes again. Look at verses 27-29. “***For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken***.” Jesus said that his second coming would be a universal and visible event which everybody in this world can see his coming. When Jesus came to this world for the first time, no one knew his coming except a few. Jesus came in a silent night and a holy night when all was calm. But when Jesus comes again, all peoples of all nations will see as they watch the Super Bowl game through TV on live. When Jesus came to this world first time, he came as a Savior and shepherd. When he comes again, he will come as the judge between the living and the dead.

When Jesus comes again, nature will respond. The sun, moon, stars, and the heavenly bodies will respond because the Son of God, the Creator of the whole universe, will come again to his world. Look at verses 30 and 31. Jesus describes the moment of his second coming. “***Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.***” What a glorious day of those who welcome his coming! What a terrible day to those who did not stand firm to the end and fall away from their faith. What a horrible day to those who rejected Jesus and persecuted Christians! Jesus will judge them one by one according to what they have done on this earth whether good or bad. Jesus will send his angels to bring his chosen people into his kingdom while others will mourn for their eternal condemnation.

Jesus’ second coming, “*parousia*” is not a fairy tale or a man-made story. This is the promise of the Holy God. Jesus promised in verses 34,35. “***Truly I tell you, 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.***” Jesus will come again as he had promised. He will come again in the same way he went up to heaven two thousand years ago. He will come again as all peoples of all nations can see. He will come again in order to bring his people into heaven and to throw away the wicked into the fire of hell. Jesus will come again when nobody knows the hour or the day. But we are sure that Jesus will come again when the gospel of his kingdom is preached to all nations. Therefore, what kind of life we should live on this earth until he comes back?