

The Memoirs of Peter
The Future According To Jesus, Part 7
Mark 13:3-37
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I invite you to take your Bibles and turn back to Mark's gospel to Jesus' sermon that's commonly called the Olivet Discourse – Jesus' longest sermon about the future. The gospel of Jesus Christ ends with a grand finale, a finale that we call the second coming. The hope of the second coming is not based on wishful thinking. It's not based on intuition. It's not based on logic. It's based on the clear promises of Scripture. And understand this: the second coming of Jesus Christ is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. To deny it is to put yourself outside the pale of historic Christianity. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books refer to Jesus' second coming. It's mentioned more in Scripture than Jesus' first coming. The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed and all of the major confessions of the church speak of Christ's return. The testimony of the early church speaks in a united voice affirming the reality of the second coming of Jesus Christ. You look at the various statements all the way back to the first non-Biblical (the oldest extra-Biblical) Christian document that exists, The Didache, written shortly after 80 A.D., says: "The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him. Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven." The epistle of Barnabas, written in the last part of the first century, says: "When His Son comes, He will destroy the wicked one and will judge the godless, will change the sun and the moon and the stars; and then He will truly rest." You forward on to Justin Martyr, the early part of the second century: "Hear, too, how He was to ascend into heaven according to prophecy and how He should come again out of heaven with glory." Irenaeus writes: "When this antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months and sit in the temple in Jerusalem. And then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire" – all of these within the first 200 years after our Lord.

Now when does this event that's so fundamental to our faith occur? I won't walk you through all of this chart again. I showed it to you last time, but just to show you the front and the end, the beginning and the end. At the beginning, you have the rapture. Sometime before the man of sin is revealed, sometime before the tribulation period begins, the church is gathered out. At the end of this seven-year period comes the second coming. Now the question is what is the difference between those two? And by the way, if you want a more thorough explanation of both the rapture and the second coming, I encourage you to go online. Back in my first four years here at Countryside, I went through a series on doctrine and I did several messages – two messages on the rapture, several messages on the tribulation and a couple of messages on the second coming as well. So you can sort of round that out, but tonight I want us to look at an overview.

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Now, when you compare the rapture and the second coming, this is what you get. With the rapture, there is no hint of judgment; the second coming, it's all about judgment (or not all about, but there's an emphasis on judgment). There are no warning signs before the rapture while dramatic signs precede the second coming. The rapture is about the rapture of living believers, but there's no mention of the rapture of living believers in connection with the second coming. There's the resurrection of dead believers in the rapture, but there's no mention of the resurrection of dead believers with the second coming. Before the tribulation comes the rapture; after the tribulation, the second coming. In the rapture, Christ comes in the air. In the second coming, Christ returns to the earth and actually puts His feet on the Mount of Olives according to the prophet Zechariah as we'll see tonight. When He comes in the rapture, He comes for His saints. When He comes in the second coming, He comes with His saints. The rapture is to take the saints to heaven. The second coming is to defeat His enemies and establish His kingdom here on this earth. That's the difference between the rapture and the second coming.

We are talking about the second of these, the second coming – the revelation of Jesus Christ. And we're looking at it from Mark's gospel. Mark 13 is commonly called the Olivet Discourse. And in this famous sermon, Jesus explains the future. So far we've studied the first two sections. We've looked at the beginning of birth pangs. This is in verse 5 to verse 13. All of these things occur throughout church history but in the first three-and-a-half years of the tribulation period, they occur with a greater frequency and intensity as the end draws near – false Christs, war, natural disasters, intense persecution, and the gospel spreading around the globe.

The second part of this sermon concerns the period that's called the great tribulation. This covers the three-and-a-half years from the midpoint of the tribulation to the second coming. And as we studied last week in verses 14 to 23, that period, that three-and-a-half years, is initiated by an event called the abomination of desolation. It's when the 'man of sin,' as Paul calls him in 2 Thessalonians 2 (he's also referred to as the antichrist in the book of Revelation) – this man establishes a covenant with Israel at the beginning of the tribulation period. At the midpoint according to Daniel 9, he breaks that covenant and he establishes himself as an object of worship. He causes the sacrifices in a rebuilt temple to cease and he makes himself the focus of worship. That begins that second three-and-a-half years. It is marked by the persecution of Israel, and specifically of those in Israel who have come to believe as a result of the gospel that will be preached during that time. It is a time of unparalleled tribulation. There's never been a time like it, Jesus says, and there never will be a time like it. It is completely unparalleled. But it is shortened for the sake of the elect, those who come to Christ during the tribulation; He is concerned about them and He shortens it for their sake. It was eternally shortened to that three-and-a-half year period. It is a time filled with spiritual deception as people try to convince, even believers (Satan mounts a last attempt, a last-ditch effort to convince even believers), to follow a false Christ. That's the great tribulation, the second three-and-a-half years.

Now tonight we come to the third part of the Olivet Discourse and it's the second coming. Look at it in Mark 13: 24:

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

Here we have the event to which all of history has been building. Notice that verse 24 begins with the word "But"; it marks a transition, a crucial transition really – a transition between the appearance of the false Messiahs that Jesus has just said will appear and try to mislead the elect and the future appearance of the true Messiah. Just because most of those who claim that Messiah has come again will be frauds, don't think for a moment that means that the true Messiah will not come. Jesus says "but" – in contrast to that, I will come.

Now let's take this passage apart and let's begin with the timing of the second coming. Jesus has made it very clear during His ministry that no one knows the exact time of His return. Matthew 24:36 (and this is repeated in Mark's gospel as we'll see in a couple of weeks): "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." In Acts, you remember, just before the ascension, the, the disciples were trying to get Jesus to tell them: 'When is it going to be?' "They were saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom unto Israel?' And He said, 'It is not you for to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority...' 'You don't know when I'm going to bring in and usher in the end.' Although no one knows the exact timing of the second coming, at the same time in this very sermon, Jesus identifies certain clues to its timing. Notice verse 24: "But in those days (that is, in the general time period that Jesus has been describing), after that tribulation (at the end of the seven years of tribulation described in verses 14 to 23)..." Matthew makes the timing even clearer. In Matthew 24:29, He says: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days..." That's when the second coming will occur – at the end of that period that we call the tribulation.

Now Jesus moves on to identify the signs that are connected to the second coming. In Matthew, Jesus refers to His second coming like this: "Just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be." In other words, when it happens, you're not going to miss it. It will be visible to everyone. So how is God going to make sure that no one misses it, to make sure that everyone knows it's coming? And the answer is through a series of cosmic signs. Look at Luke 21. See how Luke describes it. Luke 21:25:

Then there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the

powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming...

There are going to be these great cosmic signs. Not a single person on the planet will miss it. In fact, Luke tells us some will be so frightened by the terror of what they see that they will experience heart failure. These signs will come at the end of the tribulation and immediately precede the second coming.

Now look back in Mark's gospel, chapter 13, and look again at the verses I read for you, verses 24 to 27. Notice in our translation how much of that is capitalized. That's because these are quotes taken from the Old Testament. As was His habit, Jesus is basing His teaching on the Old Testament Scriptures. As one author puts it: "Jesus is grounding the hope of His disciples solely in the prophetic word." His teaching wasn't in conflict with the Old Testament Scriptures, but rather a perfect explanation of them as we're seeing even on Sunday morning.

Now in verses 24 and 25, Jesus explains that His future coming is going to be preceded by these signs – by catastrophic, cosmic disturbances. What are these signs? First of all, the sun darkened – verse 24 says: "In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened..." Jesus could be quoting any number of Old Testament texts. There are a number that speak to this and I'm not going to take you back through them. What's going on here? Some consider these verses to be purely figures of speech that describe political upheaval, for example is one commentator's idea – that's farfetched. Although it is possible that there's symbolic language in Jesus' descriptions here of what happens to the universe; at the same time, keep in mind Jesus is describing real, objective events, and the language He chooses is the best language to describe those realities. So, when Jesus says that the sun will be darkened, He means either that somehow God will supernaturally diminish the sun's light output or He means that from our vantage point (from the vantage point of earth), it will appear that the sun has been darkened because He will cause some cataclysm on earth that causes the rays of the sun not to reach this planet. But regardless, He's going to intervene miraculously. We don't know exactly what that's going to look like, but obviously it's going to mean that on earth it appears as if the sun is not functioning properly.

Now there's a remarkable similarity between what Jesus describes here and the sixth seal in the book of Revelation. You remember that title deed to the earth and the Lamb breaks the seals, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. That's the title deed to the earth and, each of those seals as Jesus breaks it, it's as if judgment then comes as a result of that on the earth. He is taking back what belongs to Him. The sixth seal, when He breaks that, brings catastrophic earthquake to the planet. Here's how it reads in Revelation 6:12: "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair..." The fact that the two are connected may mean, in fact, that this earthquake that surpasses all of the earthquakes that have occurred so far produces volcanic ash and soot from volcanic eruptions that follow that huge earthquake and it blackens out the sun. That's possibly what he's referring to. Now the

logical result – we don't know exactly the answer, but this may be it. It may be that the sun being darkened is the result of these catastrophic events God causes to happen on the planet.

Earthquake that sets loose a string of volcanic eruptions – those volcanic eruptions spew ash into the air and it literally blackens the sky.

The logical result of this, of course, leads to a second cosmic disturbance, and that is that the moon is darkened. Whether the sun itself is darkened or whether something in our atmosphere obscures our view of it, the same reality will obviously affect the moon because the moon is reflecting the light of the sun. And so in verse 24, Jesus says: “and the moon will not give its light...” Again, the similarities between Revelation and this are interesting. Revelation 6:12 goes on to say: “the sun became as black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood (as a result of that great earthquake)...” So it may be that all of this is tied together.

The third sign that's described is that the stars fall, the stars fall. Look at verse 25: “and the stars will be falling from heaven...” In the Greek language, the description here is graphic and the English translators have tried to capture it. The tense highlights the duration of time as star after star falls. Now what does Jesus mean? There are two possibilities. Again, both would be miraculous intervention. God is causing these things to happen. One possibility is that He's referring to the actual stars out in the heavens, and that those stars will leave their rotation and veer off into space so that they appear to people on earth as if they are falling. It may be that He loosens the planetary orbits and the stars go streaming out into space appearing to fall as we see 'shooting stars,' as we call them.

The second possibility is that He's describing the result of meteors hitting the earth. The earth may be showered with meteors. And I think that that may be the most likely explanation because of what is described again in Revelation. If you carefully examine the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments (those three series of judgments in groups of seven that are unleashed on the world during the tribulation period), you see meteors, and the results of meteors, described in those. Let me just give you a couple of examples. We're not going to go through all of them, but let me just give you a couple of examples of this idea of stars falling. If you were to look at the sixth seal, verse 13 says that stars will fall (in, this is Revelation 6:13) and that the sky will split apart. The Greek word for 'stars' can identify any celestial body; it's probably meteors. And the sky splitting apart probably means that the meteor impacts will be so great that it will literally self-destruct the earth's atmosphere. Verse 14 goes on to say, of Revelation 6, every island and mountain will be moved, and probably that means the earth's tectonic plates will begin to shift. This will be unimaginable.

If you fast forward to the second trumpet judgment, another meteor is implied there in Revelation 8:8-9; it ignites in the atmosphere. And upon impact with the earth, it creates a huge tidal wave that destroys a third of the world's ships according to Revelation – both those at sea and by inundating those that are in various docks around the world. And as a result of all of this,

Revelation says “the sea became blood.” Could be literal – God could actually turn the sea into blood; He’s certainly capable of that. Or it might be, as some have suggested, an event caused by the death of millions of tiny organisms as a result of the meteor shower; and if so, it would result in that. So that could be the result as well.

If you look at the third trumpet in Revelation 8:10-11, the fresh water is made bitter. All of earth’s fresh water is made bitter because a great star (it’s described -could be a comet or another meteor) – as it enters the earth’s atmosphere, it shatters into many pieces, falls to earth and poisons a third of the earth’s fresh water supply. So the bottom line is, there will be stars falling from heaven.

Jesus goes on as He describes what’s going to transpire, the signs of the second coming – not only will stars fall, but “the powers of heaven (verse 25 says) will be shaken.” It’s possible that this fourth line is really a summary of the three previous lines, but I think the construction in the Greek language makes it more likely that this is a fourth kind of cosmic disturbance. The Greek word for ‘shaken’ here occurs in Acts 16. You remember when Paul and Silas are in prison in Philippi in Acts 16 and there’s an earthquake that causes the doors to open and they’re released? This word ‘shaken’ is used of that earthquake. So the idea here is that the heavens themselves are shaken as by an earthquake. It’s like there’s this great universal, heavenly earthquake. It’s pretty interesting, when you think about it. You remember how the writer of Hebrews describes Jesus? He is the One who “upholds all things by the word of His power.” All it would require is for Jesus to simply speak and the gravitational fields that keep the universe in alignment would weaken, and the stars and planets would careen from their courses – the powers of heaven being shaken.

By the way, this same idea also appears in the book of Revelation. You can see this in several of the judgments there. If you look at the fourth trumpet, Revelation 8:13 speaks of the heavens being struck and a third of the sun, moon and stars are affected. It could be that Revelation is saying the day-night cycle will be altered, or it could be that God will supernaturally diminish the intensity of those bodies, radically altering the earth’s climate. We just don’t know, but clearly, the powers of heaven will be shaken.

If you look at the fourth bowl judgment – those bowls are not like cereal bowls; instead picture a flat plate, kind of a flat bowl that’s easily dumped and it pictures God’s rapid judgment upon the earth at the very end. And when you look at the fourth bowl, Revelation 16:8-9 describes the sun scorching men – true global warming. Perhaps through the destruction of the earth’s protective atmosphere through all of the meteors and the atmosphere being affected by that, the sun will begin to scorch the earth and the result will be fierce drought. There will be heat. There will be drought. There will be painful blisters. The polar icecaps will melt – devastating.

The fifth bowl judgment speaks of there being cosmic darkness connected with pain. There will be pain caused by sores that were mentioned in previous judgments. There will be the absence of

water, blistering heat. And in the middle of that comes cosmic darkness. You know that's a terrifying thought, isn't it? I mean, think about, think about how much easier it is to bear up under pain and suffering during the daylight hours? But when the darkness comes, everything just becomes more intense. A toothache during the day is a distraction; at night in the darkness, it's all-consuming. In the darkness, the circumstances of the people on earth will be so intense that John says they will gnaw their tongues.

So those are just a few examples of how the powers of heaven will be shaken. Jesus says 'you won't miss it.' There will be signs before the second coming. And then will come, in response to all of that, not only have we seen the timing of the second coming, the signs of the second coming, but now comes the appearance of the Son, the appearance of the Son. Look at verse 26: "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." 'Then' – following quickly on the heels of those cosmic disturbances, coming on the heels of global darkness when there's nothing to be seen will come the shining, blazing brilliance of the Son of God like lightning across the sky.

"They shall see..." – the word 'they' here, in context, has to refer to all of the people who were living on the planet at that time. Revelation 1:7 says: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." Notice John, in that verse, makes Jesus' appearance global ("all the tribes of earth"), but he also makes it very personal ("every eye will see Him"). Before mass media, Christians through the ages have speculated how that could be. In fact, there are some fascinating accounts from the early church fathers. One early church father thought the way it was going to happen is God was going to put a blazing cross in the sky. Of course, now, with the advent of worldwide media coverage, we no longer have to be concerned about how it could happen that every eye could see Him. It may be through means or it may be that God does it miraculously so that no one on the planet misses it. And He doesn't count on CNN. We don't know. Regardless of how it happens, Jesus says "they shall see."

Notice verse 26. What do they see? "The Son of Man coming in clouds..." That simple statement points to the grand finale of human history and the grand finale of God's eternal redemptive plan – the Son of Man. Throughout His ministry, Jesus used that expression of Himself – the Son of Man. You can see it throughout Mark's gospel. What's interesting about that description is it can be used simply to refer to Jesus as a genuine human being. Some of the prophets used that expression 'Son of Man.' But it was intentionally ambiguous because not only could it refer to Jesus as a man (He's the Son of Man!); it could also mean much more. By itself, the title simply means 'Jesus is human,' but here in Mark 13:26, it can only mean one thing. Jesus is identifying Himself with a particular 'Son of Man' in Daniel chapter 7. Turn back to Daniel 7. Oh and by the way, if you doubt this, stay tuned. When we get to Jesus' trial, He comes back to this passage and the high priest doesn't miss it. He knows what Jesus is claiming, that He's claiming this passage. Daniel 7:9. Daniel has this vision in the early part of chapter 7 of the

kingdoms of the world. And instead of an image like Nebuchadnezzar's image back in chapter 2, this time it's presenting those empires of the world as beasts, ugly monstrosities. While all of that's going on, verse 9 says:

I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat (this is God Himself); His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire (a chariot throne). And a river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened. Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking (this is antichrist in context; this is the man who will set himself up against God); I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. And as for the rest of the beasts (the rest of the world empires), their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.

They each died. Each world empire came and left, but continued and sort of was subsumed in the next. Verse 13 – here's, here we get to the heart of it:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him (to this Son of Man) was given a dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

That's what Jesus is claiming. He is claiming to be this person. He is claiming to be the one to whom God the Father gives eternal glory which, remember, God doesn't share His glory with anyone except, in this case, His Son.

By the way, the clouds that are described here are not normal clouds. Instead, they probably refer to the 'shekinah,' that brilliant, blazing glory cloud that pictured God's presence in the Old Testament. When Jesus comes, it's not going to be with those fluffy white things that we enjoy floating through the afternoon sky. It's going to be with the blazing brilliance of the 'shekinah' glory of God.

Jesus is coming back. And when He comes, it will be with indescribable majesty and glory. Zechariah 14:1-4 says when everything looks its darkest for the nation Israel and for Jerusalem, when it is being attacked at the end of that period of time, then He will come and He will set His feet on the Mount of Olives, the very place from which He departed in Acts chapter 1 and the angel said, 'He'll come in like manner as you've seen Him go.'

But turn with me to Revelation 19. Here is the most graphic account of the return of Jesus Christ. And again, we studied this text so I encourage you to go back and listen, if you want to walk through it in detail, which we did. But notice Revelation 19:11:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire (He has piercing laser eyes that distinguish everything the way they really are), and on His head are many diadems (He's a tried and true veteran. This is not a new warrior. This is a warrior who has fought many successful battles); and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. (People always ask, 'So what is the name?' Think about that for a moment.) He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God. (This robe is dipped in blood because, again, He is a warrior who has fought for His people throughout human history. He is used to victory. He hasn't even gotten to the battle that He's coming to fight. This is past battles that have stained His robe. And His name is called the Word of God.) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, are following Him on white horses. (By the way, what I love about this battle is you and I don't have to fight in it. We just are along for the ride.) And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations. (The idea is that Jesus Himself doesn't have to fight, physically. Just as He made the world by the words of His mouth, He speaks and His enemies are destroyed.) He will rule them with a rod of iron and (here's a terrifying picture – when He returns) He will tread the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. (The people of earth who are His enemies who have battled Him and cursed His name and abused Him and His people in every way will be like a wine vat filled with grapes, and He on His mighty charger will crush the life from them.) He goes on to say: 'And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords.'

He is the exalted One. He's coming with great power and glory, He said. And there it is. That's the description of it. He came the first time, almost unnoticed, and in complete humiliation. When He returns, it will be with the glory of His Father.

How will the people of earth respond to the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ? Here's how they'll respond. Matthew 24:30: "And the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn..." Luke 21 – there will be dismay among the nations. There will be perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and from the expectation of what's coming. Revelation 1:7: "Behold, He is coming...every eye will see Him...and all the tribes of earth will mourn over Him" – but not mourning to repentance, but the mourning for the consequences that are coming. He's coming.

When He comes, what will be the focus of the Son? Look at verse 27. You know, there are many reasons for the second coming. One reason is to execute God's vengeance on the wicked. That's one of the reasons Jesus is coming. Second Thessalonians 1 says "the Lord will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." That's one of the reasons for the return of Christ. But the real focus of the second coming in this text, Jesus says, is not the wicked but it's His elect. Look at Mark 13:27: "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of earth to the farthest end of heaven."

Again, notice the time reference here – 'then.' In conjunction with the second coming, Jesus will send forth the angels, those powerful created beings intended to serve God and the saints. And at His command, the angels will gather together His elect. Who are these people? Well, putting the total picture together, these are probably believers who came to faith in Jesus as Messiah during the tribulation and survived the onslaught of the man of sin. Here's how Daniel puts it in Daniel 12:1. He says at the end of that verse after that time of tribulation, he says: "everyone who is found written in the book will be rescued (will be rescued)." Jesus will come to rescue His elect.

You see this as well in Zechariah. Turn to Zechariah with me – not a book we go to often right at the end of the Old Testament. Zechariah chapter 12. I love this because it just shows the grace of God. Zechariah 12:9: "And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem." Remember, at the end of the tribulation period the nations gather to destroy God's people, and God says, 'I will set out to destroy them.' Verse 10, in the middle of that: "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo." That was the weeping over the death of King Josiah; it'll be like that, he says. Chapter 13:1: "In that day (the weeping won't last because in that day) a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, (a fountain) for sin and for impurity." Jesus is coming for His elect.

Notice He gathers them (back in Mark's gospel, verse 27, He gathers them) from the four winds; that is, from the four points of the compass, and from the farthest end of earth to the farthest end of heaven. Apparently, that refers to the reality that heaven and earth meet at the horizon. And so from every point of horizon, He will gather His elect from all the compass points of the globe. They'll be scattered to every corner of the globe (His elect), but He will gather them. This shows the grace of God, doesn't it?, during the tribulation. Even as He pours out His wrath on the earth, He'll still be redeeming people from all over the planet. And He's coming back to rescue them.

By the way, this expression at the end of verse 27 also shows the universal rule of Jesus Christ. There is no place on the planet. Jesus is not a local deity. As Revelation says, I love this. Revelation 7:9, John speaking:

“I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues (you can’t get more inclusive than that, okay? Every ethnicity, every language – however you want to classify people, they’re all represented), standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes (they’re believers), and palm branches were in their hands... One of the elders says to John, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

Some are martyred for their faith during the tribulation period; they’re pictured here. Others from every tribe and nation and tongue scattered all over the globe will survive, and Jesus will come for them. Jesus is coming back and, chiefly, it will be for His own.

Now, when we contemplate the second coming, what are the lessons for us? What should we learn? How should we respond? First of all, when we think of the second coming, it should confront us with the reality of a future judgment. Jesus will interrupt life as we know it. Do you understand that? Life like it is today is not going to continue forever. It could be the rapture will occur tonight. It could be the time events could start in place where seven years from now (Jesus returns) after pouring out His wrath on this planet, He returns. But He will return. Make no mistake. You will stand – or more accurately, you will fall – before Jesus Christ. There will be no exceptions. You and I all will fall before Jesus Christ, personally. Matthew 16:27: Jesus says: “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.” Hebrews 9:27: “... it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment...” It may be by His coming. It may be by death. But the reality of future judgment is coming. In Acts 17:31, the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead shows that through this same person, through Jesus, “because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness...” The question is are you really ready for that? Are you ready if tonight, in death, you slip out of this world to stand before Jesus Christ?

There’s a second thing that we should think about when we think about His coming and that is, as believers, it should strengthen our hope. Look at 2 Thessalonians with me just briefly, Second Thessalonians 1:4. Paul talks about the amazing persecution and inflictions that the church endures in this world – some of them inflicted by those who hate Christ, others just part of living in a fallen world. But he says, ‘Listen. Christ is coming. Christ is coming.’ And verse 6 says:

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you (primarily the reference here is to those who are antagonistic to our faith), and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be

revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Verse 10: “when He will come to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...” Listen. Your faith is true. He’s coming. Let it strengthen your hope as you face the difficulties of this life.

It should also encourage our personal holiness. I won’t turn there, but 1 John 3:2, you remember, John says: “... it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we will see Him as He is.” When He appears, we’ll be like Him. So how do you respond to that reality? For us, the rapture – how do you respond to the reality that Jesus is coming? He says: “Everyone who has this hope in Him (what?) purifies himself, even as He is pure.” The hope of Jesus coming, of standing before the Lord whom we’ve never seen but love, should cause us to long for personal holiness.

And finally, it should remind us of Jesus’ love for us. I love this. Listen. If you are a true Christian, you are the special object of Jesus’ affection, just as the elect who are on the earth at that time at the second coming that He returns to rescue. He comes back to rescue them because He loves them. And you are the object of His affection as well. You are part of the bride of Jesus Christ. Think about that. You know, we’ve all seen a man who is in love doting over his fiancée. What’s amazing to me is that’s how Jesus Christ thinks of us. The affection that a loving man has for his wife-to-be is the very best way God could choose to illustrate and describe Jesus’ view of us corporately and of us individually. No matter what’s happening in your life right now or what may come in the future, Jesus Christ loves you as His elect with an undying love and He will come for you. The world has not seen the last of Jesus Christ. He came and He’s coming again. Let’s pray together.

Father, our prayer has to be that of the apostle John: “Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.” We thank You, O God, that for us here, either in death or in the rapture, we will see our Lord. But we thank You that His second coming will happen – that He will come back to this planet and put His feet here on the Mount of Olives, and He will rule and He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Father, don’t let those things be fantasy to us. Don’t let them be fiction. Strengthen our faith that those things are as real as anything else in our world and more real. Father, may we live in the light of that, with hope and encouragement, pursuing holiness in the fear of God. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.