



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 23
November 13, 2022

Ready Or Not, Here I Come

Luke 21:5–36

⁵ *And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶ “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.” 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?” 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. 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.”*

¹⁰ *Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. 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. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.*

²⁰ *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ 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, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ 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. 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.*

²⁵ *“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, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads,*



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because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹ And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

“Make sure you don’t get drunk.” That’s a little bit like the warning label on a hair dryer that says, “Don’t use in or near water” or the one on the top of a ladder that says, “Not a step.” But every year someone gets fried by a hair dryer and others fall off the top of ladders. People don’t always respond well to warnings. They often ignore them or rebel against them, doing the very thing they were warned not to do.

We can trace this all the way back to the earliest moments of mankind, when God warned Adam: “Don’t eat from this one tree.”¹ He hadn’t even made Eve yet. But, as so often happens, Adam disregarded God’s warning, and in doing so, he brought consequences that are with us to this very day.

Jesus has some serious warnings for us in today’s Gospel. The first is a caution against drunkenness. Notice, please, that the prohibition is not against consuming anything alcoholic. Jesus doesn’t say, for instance, “Don’t have a glass of wine with dinner,” or “Don’t have a beer after work.” He’s saying, “Don’t take into your body anything that will inhibit your ability to be fully aware of who you are and whose you are.”

The Apostle Peter warned his readers to be sober.² The roaring lion he speaks of – the devil – may be beaten and caged, but he’s still dangerous to those who walk into his clutches. Intoxication obscures the danger. Every now and then you’ll hear about someone getting drunk and crawling into a lion cage or a bear enclosure.³ Somehow, the bear always wins!

So it is with Satan. With clouded minds, people blindly offer themselves to destruction at his hands, while sensible people look on in stunned disbelief, witnessing what seems to them like willful self-destruction.

But . . . have you fitfully applied this warning to yourself? Or do you think such a caution is only for “someone else?”

Maybe . . . but Jesus isn’t done yet. He warns next of being “worried about life.” Everyday anxiety is just as troublesome as getting blind, stinking drunk, for it, too, can lead us to stop keeping our eyes focused on Jesus, “the founder and perfecter” of our faith.⁴



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Worldly concerns blind us to heavenly concerns. This was something Jesus had addressed earlier in Luke's Gospel. The parable of the sower speaks of the seed that fell among thorns, representing those who are "choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life."⁵

This second warning is more comprehensive than the first. Most of us do remain sober, but, as Peter's epistle continues, "be sober-minded and watchful."⁶ So Jesus calls us not only to be free of chemical hindrances, but also of personal ones. The lion doesn't only get the drunks; he also gets the hunter who gets too cocky, the inattentive driver, the child who doesn't heed his parents' cautions.

In short, *anyone* who allows the *bad* or even the *good* things of life to monopolize his attention, prioritizing them over his life with the Savior, is in grave, mortal, eternal danger. Jesus doesn't specify all the ways that being "worried about life" can get in the way of being "alert at all times." To do so would create a list thicker than the Bible. It seems we're so clever that can invent new things to worry about faster than we can deal with the old ones.

What is it this week? The on-going war in Ukraine? The midterm elections? The economic recession and difficulty obtaining products and services? Maybe it's problems with your neighbors? Are your children giving you grief? Is someone at work or school pushing all the wrong buttons? Did the bottom fall out of your IRA or 401k? Is the increase in your Social Security going to keep pace with inflation? Is your spouse acting strangely? Will we ever know contentment or peace? Take a moment to think about it; what's on your mind right now that might cause you to quit paying attention to this sermon – or to Jesus Himself?

Not one of us can claim that God has our full, undivided attention. We all struggle with staying vigilant. Each of us has personal issues that we persist in dwelling on, rather than casting our cares upon Him who cares for us.⁷

Beloved, as we edge nearer to the end of the Church Year and the approach of Advent, Jesus is telling us, "Ready or not, here I come!" Is it easy for you to say – and *mean*: "Come, Lord Jesus?" Isn't it easier to be like the guests invited to the feast in Jesus' parable?⁸ They said things like, "I just got married," or "I just bought a cow." But, what they're really saying is, "There's something more important to me than your feast." Jesus says, "Ready or not, here I come." And we want to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, but . . ."

"But" what? What's more important . . . to us? . . . to me? . . . to you? "Come, Lord Jesus . . ." but "wait 'til the big game is over." Or maybe, "Wait until I've had a little more time with the grandkids . . ." Or "Wait 'til I can make amends with someone I've wronged."

Or maybe it's, "Wait, because I haven't done much in Your kingdom. Wait 'til I get up enough courage to bring my unchurched friends to hear the Gospel. Hold on until my life is more in order. Delay until I begin to pray regularly. Come just as soon as I make up for not giving enough of an offering, for not doing enough work around the church, for not spending enough time in Your Word." Whatever stands behind your plea for Him to wait,



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it's a bit brash, don't you think? To tell our Lord to wait when He's already said, "Ready or not, here I come?"

The truth is, we're never going to make ourselves ready enough. We can't root out all our evil by ourselves. We can't clear out our anxiety by ourselves; all we can do is replace one concern with another. We can't fix everything that's broken; we're the ones who broke it in the first place. If the plumber ruins your pipes, are you going to hire that same plumber to come and fix them? No way.

"But, how do I change, Pastor? How do I make things right before Jesus comes and I find myself out of time?" If change is to occur in you, it has to come from outside of you. A corrupt person is incapable of even recognizing all the corruption in his heart and soul, let alone purge that corruption. And, truth be told, on our own, we're all corrupt. That's why we find our comfort in Jesus' words: "Straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (v. 28).

Jesus didn't say that we're getting nearer to our redemption, as though we were moving toward it. He says our redemption is drawing near to us; *He's* drawing near to us, for He is our Redemption. We can stand before Him because He laid His life down for us. We can raise our heads because bowed His head for us in death. We can stay awake because He rose from the sleep of death, gaining for us life everlasting.

He did it all for us, beloved. All those things you can't do, He did for you. He prayed constantly, worked unceasingly, was ever in the Scriptures, and gave everything – even His life – in obedience to His Father. All that's left for you is to believe in Him, trust in Him, and live your life – by His grace and with His help – in gratitude for God's love toward you in Jesus.

"Ready or not, here I come!" Jesus says. The world will find out what a terrible threat this is when His judgment is unveiled on that great and terrible Day. There will be wailing, weeping, and sheer horror. Those who didn't care, those who cared for all the wrong things, those who thought there would always be more time to get things right, will find out otherwise.

But "Ready or not, here I come!" He says. His Church will find out what a wonderful promise has been kept when His judgment is unveiled on that great and marvelous Day. There will be celebrating, smiling, and unending bliss. Those whose cares were taken away, who were taught to consider the things of God, who lived as if each moment might be their last on earth, will find out how their greatest imaginings cannot compare with the reality of life forever with Jesus.

As long as we're in this flesh, we will continue to have the "thorns" that will try to choke us with "the anxieties and riches and pleasures of this life." But Christ will, through His Word and Sacraments, lead us through these distractions, these diversions, these instruments of destruction. Indeed, as the trials of life tempt us, His Spirit will lead us to call even more for His return.

When our cares grow thickest, we who are nourished with the forgiveness of sins



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can see the Lord clearing them away before they can destroy us. We find ourselves listening attentively to our Savior's call, "Here I come!" because we know that soon it will be replaced with those even more beautiful words, "Here I am!"

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

1. Genesis 2:16-17

2. 1 Peter 5:8

3

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1229998/The-horrifying-moment-bear-mauls-man-climbed-zoo-enclosure.html>

<https://www.tmg.com/2020/05/22/man-tries-to-drown-bear-zoo-poland-allegedly-drunk-viral-video/>

4. Hebrews 12:2

5. Luke 8:14

6. 1 Peter 5:8

7. 1 Peter 5:7

8. Luke 14:12-24