



Hard Sayings of Jesus

Lesson 5: Jesus is coming... soon?

Opening Prayer

Introduction

Name some broken promises that can shake a person or that have really shaken you.

Why are broken promises so hurtful?

That's all the more true of Jesus' promises. If Jesus made a promise that didn't come true, what would that mean?

Studying God's Word

Jesus—as well as the rest of the writers of Scripture—gives us quite a bit of information about the end of the world and the circumstances leading up to it. The message is clear: God wants us to be ready at any time (and *all the time*) for Christ's return.

In recent years, however, many critics of the Bible have begun to teach that Jesus and the apostles insisted that the Last Day would take place within the first generation after Christ. They go on to teach that since Jesus did *not* return at that time, the church began to change its teaching to what we believe today: that we should always be ready for Christ's imminent return.

It's important to remember that one of the main reasons for this false teaching from modern critics is that they start with an assumption that the Bible isn't true, and they look for ways to undermine its message. But they often quote Scripture in their defense, and at first glance, their arguments could lead us to struggle with what Jesus is saying.

Mark 8:34–9:1 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." ^{9:1} And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

1. Jesus had just predicted his death (something Peter actually rebuked him for!) and now tells the disciples that following him will come at a cost. To encourage them as they follow him, what promise did Jesus make in 9:35 and imply in 8:36?
2. Some people point to Christ's follow up comment that "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" to mean that Jesus was promising his original disciples that some of them would still be living when he returned. However, in all three gospels where this episode is recorded, it is immediately followed by the account of the transfiguration, where Jesus briefly appears to Peter, James, and John in his unveiled glory. In that context what would be the significance of Jesus' words in 9:1?
3. One of the reasons people conclude that Jesus was promising his imminent return is that they interpret "the kingdom of God" to refer to Jesus' coming on the Last Day. How do the following passages help give you a different understanding?

Luke 17:20-21 (ESV) Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Luke 24:46-49 [Jesus] told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

Mark 13:5-31 Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

¹² "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ¹³ All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

¹⁴ “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. ¹⁶ Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁷ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ¹⁸ Pray that this will not take place in winter, ¹⁹ because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. ²⁰ If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. ²¹ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. ²² For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. ²³ So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

²⁴ “But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ ²⁶ At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

²⁸ “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

5. Jesus spends the first portion of this reading (v. 5-13) telling his disciples about the signs of the end of the world. List some of them.
6. Beginning at verse 14, Jesus uses the coming destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies prophesied in Daniel as a picture of what the last days will be like.

Daniel 9:27 [The Anointed One] will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on it.”

General Titus captured Jerusalem in 70 AD and brought Roman idols onto the temple grounds before the temple and later the entire city was razed to the ground effectively ending the priesthood and the Old Testament sacrificial system.

In this picture of the end times there would be an abomination in the temple of God—understood by Lutheran theologians to refer to the Antichrist (cf. the description of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2:3-4), including more false Christs and false miracles.

In the days after Jerusalem’s destruction and immediately before Christ’s return there will be catastrophic portents in the heavens (v. 24-27).

7. Jesus’ words in verse 30 have convinced people that he taught he would be returning within that current generation. But what do you notice about those signs? (Give examples if you can.)

8. All of those signs *were* fulfilled within the lifetime of that generation and continue to be so now. For those who think that Jesus is saying that his return would take place during the next generation, it's clarifying to read the following verses. How does Jesus make it clear that he wasn't setting a time line for the end of the world?

Mark 13:32-37 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. ³⁵ Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' "

8. Again, explain the point Jesus is making.
9. We wouldn't be the first to misunderstand Jesus' words about his return.

a.) With Christ's suffering and death and resurrection completed what did the disciples assume?

Acts 1:6-8 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

b.) What struggles and anxieties did false understandings about Christ's return caused for the Thessalonians?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Peter 3:6-13 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

10. What *isn't* the reason for (to our minds) the long span of time since Jesus' resurrection? What *is* the reason?

11. When we recognize this, what does it help us do?

12. It's good to realize that the end is near and drawing nearer all the time. Think of ways to encourage your fellow believers with this truth.

Summary | Key Points

- Depending on the context, the phrase the “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” isn't automatically equivalent to heaven itself. Very often it's the preaching of the gospel here on earth and has been present since the days of Christ and the apostles.
- Jesus calls us to eagerly expect his return at any moment.
- Though God's “soon” and our “soon” aren't always the same thing, we know God will come back at just the right time. When he has called all his elect home.

Prayer