

# First Sunday in Advent

**THE WORLD PASSES, THE WORD SURPASSES, AND  
WHICH WILL WE?**

**Luke 21:25-36**

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**Analysis by Robert W. Bertram**

*[This Sabbatheology was originally presented to the Order of Philippi by Robert Bertram in Cape Coral, Florida, in 1997.]*

25There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away u ntil all things have taken place. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

34Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, 35like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to

escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The World Passes**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Going***

These “signs” which warn us of the end of the world we underestimate. Perhaps we shrug them off: “Such signs have always been around, and the world hasn’t ended yet.” Right, not for us it hasn’t, who are still alive. But that’s just the point, it’s the end of our world which is coming. Or maybe we do watch the signs (like El Nino) but we minimize how much of an “end” the signs really signify. As if that end were predictable, partial and merely physical. It is not predictable. “Unaware.” “Like a snare.” Snap, like a trap! Nor is it partial. The trapdoor is wall-to-wall, for everyone. And that is only our external problem.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Going***

Internally, our problem is even worse: people “fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world.” Our problem within is a “heart” problem: unfaith, despair. It is a spiritual problem, all right, but with very behavioral, “cardiac” symptoms: “your hearts [kardia] weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life.”

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Gone***

Still worse than the external and internal dimensions of our problem is its infernal dimension. That is, we may not “have strength [an older translation: “be accounted worthy”] to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man.” So that’s the end which the signs really signify, the coming of “the Son of man,” the Judge. Can we survive his coming? Or will we too pass away?

## PROGNOSIS: The WORD Surpasses

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *Redeemer*

But his coming, the same coming of the very same Son of man, can instead be our “redemption.” For this Son of man who will come as our awesome judge will be the same Jesus Christ who once took the pains to warn us with his caring “words” in this gospel lesson. And those dear words of his, so he promises, will never pass away, though everything else (“heaven and earth”) will pass away. Even though Christ finally will come looking like no one has ever before seen him (“coming in a cloud with power and great glory”), he will look like that only because he has since been raised from what he was originally: weak and inglorious and crucified, for our “redemption.” When the frightful Judge comes, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, we may hold him to the “words” of our friend Jesus. For that is who the Judge is, our friend in court. It does make sense after all to call El Nino by that name, terrible world-wrecker though it is: The Little Boy, the Christchild. He is the eternal solution, the direct answer to our infernal problem.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Redeemed*

Better yet, the solution becomes ours personally when it is interiorized as faith, the internal answer to our internal problem, faith in place of unfaith, confidence instead of despair. We now dare to trust that the end of the world and, more amazingly, the coming of the Son of man are an end to be welcomed, an end and a new beginning. As believers we may count on that, because of him whose “words will never pass away.”

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Redeeming*

Still better, the solution is also external, every bit as external, as much in the public eye as the terrible “signs” are. For the believers will quite openly greet those signs, how? Not by cringing at them and certainly not by denying them or

trivializing them but, on the contrary, by welcoming them as Jesus urges us to: "Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads." For everyone to see? Of course. You don't think for a moment, do you, that that kind of bizarre, upbeat Christian reaction could go unnoticed? In fact, the believers with their upturned, beaming faces—right in the face of the "distress of nations"—may just upstage the signs in the sun and moon and stars. When they do, you'll know the Kingdom is near. And the King.