



Luke 21:20-24

“Flee to the Rock of Your Salvation”

20 " But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.

21 "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her.

22 "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

23 "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.

24 "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

I was watching Foxnews as they were covering the course of Hurricane Katrina as it entered the gulf of Mexico and began making its way towards Louisiana. One of the anchors was in New Orleans a day or so before it hit, and he was interviewing residents who had decided to stay and tough it out. The interesting thing was, his questions at that point were less of the “why have you decided to stay” variety and more of the “*Are you crazy, don’t you know there’s a Category 5 Hurricane headed this way???*” type. The answers he got, even from State Officials were “*Well we’re tough down here in Nawlins, we’ve been through this kind of thing before, we can tough it out.*”

Well hindsight being 20-20, those residents found out the hard way, that no-one “Toughs Out” a category 5 monster of a hurricane, and certainly not by hunkering down below sea-level, surrounded entirely by water, and protected from raging flood waters only by a few feet of clay.

The only sensible thing to do when you are warned of the approach of impending calamity of that kind of scale is to flee, to run for safety, to head for the hills.

Now one of the many signs of the great love which Christ has for His Sheep, is that in the last week prior to His trial and crucifixion, which He knew was rapidly approaching, He was concerned to make sure that his disciples were warned about the destruction of Jerusalem that was to come, and knew to watch for the signs and when they saw them rather than staying or toughing it out, perhaps through some misguided patriotism, that they would flee from Jerusalem to safety.

The events that Jesus spoke of in verses 20-24 were fulfilled to the letter just under 40 years later when in 70 AD during the Jewish Revolt against the Roman occupation the city of Jerusalem was entirely surrounded by Roman Legions and brought under a terrible siege. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that the Romans, mindful of the huge number of rebels and pilgrims who had fled into the city, built their own wall around the city to ensure that no one and nothing could enter or leave. For five awful months the defenders of the city were systematically starved and ravaged by disease. Finally after thousands of the inhabitants had died and the rest had been reduced to a truly pitiful condition, the Romans broke into the city and put all of it to the torch. Every single resident of Jerusalem was either

put to the sword or sold into slavery, there were no exceptions. As Jesus had warned ***“they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations”***

For many years following the siege and destruction of the city and the temple, no Jew was again allowed to dwell in or around Jerusalem. In fact the Romans posted the 10th Legion, the “Fretensians” to guard the city and slay all who might try to enter it without the express permission of the emperor.

The Jewish Rebels had thought that they could stand against the wrath of Rome and her legions and that they would be safe behind the walls of Jerusalem, but when the storm broke they found that those walls could not protect them from the wrath to come. In fact, in the midst of the siege, those walls they trusted in became simply a prison from which there was no escape.

Eusebius the early Christian historian tells us though that the Christians of Jerusalem listened to warning of Christ, and as the Romans advanced on Jerusalem and the Zealots took over the city, the Christians fled across the Jordan to a city in the Mountains called Pella. There they were safe. They found safety because they listened to Christ’s warning to ***“flee to the mountains.”***

How did Jesus know to warn His followers to flee though? His warning was issued 40 years before the siege. Even the book of Luke itself, in which these words were recorded, undoubtedly predates the Jewish Rebellion. How do we know that? Well Luke also wrote Acts, and in the beginning of that book we he speaks of his Gospel account in this fashion: ***“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”*** Now Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome in the early 60s. Meaning that this work was written sometime between the late 50s and early 60s AD.

So how did Jesus know, how did the Christians have an early warning to flee? Well the weatherman warns the people to flee from a Hurricane because he has all sorts of sophisticated radar and satellite imagery with which to track the storm. But even with all the technological advances we’ve made, all he can do is guess what the storm will do, and the damage it can cause. That isn’t what Jesus, he didn’t weigh the political circumstances, and then guess there would be a rebellion and a siege. HE saw those terrible events as perfectly then as if he were watching them unfold.

And the important thing to remember is that in doing that, Christ was just looking down the corridor of time and seeing what men would do, He was speaking of events that God Himself had foreordained and that Christ knew because He is the second person of the Triune Godhead.

It’s akin to the prophecy in Isaiah 46:9-11 where many years before the destruction of Babylon by the Medeo-Persian empire, God declared it would happen saying:

***“For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,
10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'
11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country.
Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.”***

God not only said they would be destroyed He declares He will bring a man from the east, the king of Persia, a man not yet born, to execute his counsel.

In the same way, this coming destruction of the Jerusalem that Christ is warning of was the execution of God's counsel. He was going to use the hated Romans as His instruments to bring about the days of vengeance of verse 22.

Now some people would flinch at that, why would God foreordain the destruction of Jerusalem?

Well, you've actually already read the answer to that turn back if you will to Luke 19:41

There you will remember we have Christ's lament as he entered into the city:

Luke 19:41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,

42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

43 "For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,

44 "and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

God is patient He is as he declared to Moses ***"The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,"***

For that reason he gave the Canaanites 430 years to turn from their sin to Him, he sent Jonah to Nineveh, he sent Prophet after prophet to his people Israel, and finally ***"having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"***

And yet they would not believe, they would not turn, so the time of mercy and peace closes, and then came the time of judgment or as Jesus put it "the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled"

J.C. Ryle commented of that phrase – ***"There is something peculiarly dreadful in this expression. It shows us that the sins of the Jewish nation had been long noted down in the book of God's remembrance. The Jews by their unbelief and impenitence, had been treasuring up wrath against themselves for many hundred years. The anger of God, like a pent-up river, had been silently accumulating for ages. The fearful tribulation which attended the siege of Jerusalem, would only be the outburst of a thunderstorm which had been gradually gathering since the days of the kings. It would only be the fall of a sword which had been long hanging over Israel's head."***

Now there are many applications that could be made regarding these verses, not the least of them being the love of Christ for His people, the fact that He is God and so on. But I only want to focus in on the application that I think is most fundamental.

Flee from the Wrath to Come!

The Jewish defenders of Jerusalem in 70AD didn't flee from the wrath to come because they could tough it out. But ultimately, there was no fleeing from the wrath of God when it fell upon them. The Romans may have been the instrument, but the judgment was the Lord's, Christ makes that clear.

Now we come from a very self-sufficient nation, people think they can tough out Hurricanes, I just spoke with a Pastor friend of mine from Beaumont, Texas who has been frantically trying to track down a diabetic member of his congregation who insisted he could tough out Rita and insisted on staying put. He only just found him in the Intensive Care unit of a hospital. Needless to say, the man was wrong, the place where he was wasn't safe, and he didn't have the capacity to weather that storm.

But as frustrating as that kind of stubbornness is, and isn't new to Pastors. After all, a good pastor stands up week after week and essentially warns people that there is a calamity coming that is more terrible and unstoppable than any Hurricane, and he warns them to flee to safety. That calamity is of course judgment day, for the bible warns that ***"it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"***

But so often this warning is greeted either with plain old disbelief that any such day is in fact coming, or with a, ***"Well I'll be ok. I've been through tough times before I'll get through this under my own power."*** The famous, well I've tried to live a good life... etc. You know what that is in the end? Its the spiritual equivalent of a man living below sea-level, surrounded by water saying that he'll be alright just where he is when you tell him a giant hurricane is coming.

Kids, what are you supposed to do when someone warns you there is a fire in the house? You get out right? None of you would be so silly as to think you'd be safe staying where you are. How many of you remember Christian from Pilgrim's Progress? Where was he born? What did he need to do? He needed to flee from the wrath to come, right? Where did he flee to? He fled to the wicket gate, he fled to Jesus for safety. You do likewise!

Do not be deceived, all men are sinners, and the wages of sin is death. The only salvation therefore is not to trust in walls or spiritual levees that will crumble and fail, it is to flee to the mountains, to flee to the solid rock of your salvation, and that rock is Jesus. Do not think for a moment that there is safety anywhere else for as Peter solemnly declared in Acts 4:12 ***"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."***