

Whenever we speak of the end times... (the Return of Christ)... our hearts often begin to beat faster... partly out of **joy**... but let's be honest... sometimes it is mixed with **fear**.

To speak of end times... is to speak of somewhat **uncertain** times. ... Part of our passage this morning explains:

*“Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also when you see these things taking place, you know that the Kingdom of God is near.”*

And elsewhere we read: "No one knows about that day or hour...not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son." ... But... perhaps it isn't the **uncertainty** of calendars and dates that troubles us the most. ... For those who have studied end-times prophecy... (eschatology)... you know that all of the **bad** conditions that we currently notice here on earth... are only going to intensify... It will go from bad to **worse**... before the Lord returns...

As believers... I do **not** believe that we will go through the horrible 7 year period... known as the "Tribulation." But I think Scripture indicates that conditions **will** worsen – leading up to the time when the church will be raptured... which starts the "Tribulation." ... So there is **fear** in some believers because they anticipate these increasingly difficult times that are coming.

Our passage today in Luke... is a lesson that Jesus taught... which has been named... "The Mount Olivet Discourse." ... In it... Jesus takes on the

role of Prophet... and He prophesies rather extensively about “end times.” As we study this today... you will notice that Christ’s prophecy shows that difficult days **are** ahead.

We read a passage like what we come to today in Luke 21... and it's like we're reading about the last six miles of a marathon. ... A marathon is just a little over 26 miles... but I read this week that **experts** tell runners not to run over 20 miles in their training. ... Beyond the 20 mile mark... for any runner... say the experts... " *You don't know what you're getting yourself into. ... You may hit a wall. ... You may have cramps. ... You risk injuring yourself bad enough to miss the marathon altogether... So as you train... do **not** run the full 26 miles that you will run on the day of the marathon... For training routines... limit it to just 20 miles*" ... .. Every marathon runner seems to believe that if he/she trains hard enough in their limited routine... they will be ready to run the 20 miles and then the extra six on the day of the marathon... and will be able to cross that glorious finish line.

We know the last days are going to be hard... and we know that there is nothing we can do now to replicate what it will be like... in order to train for it. ... But Jesus has told us what to look for... and... (ironically)... He **does** tell us to be prepared... .. But if... just like a marathon runner... we cannot exactly replicate it... in order to train... how **do we** prepare for it...?

This is what we will discover from our passage... We prepare by 1) knowing of it’s certainty... 2) by being wise and discerning about the false claims of religious hucksters... 3) we prepare by resting in the fact that God is sovereign... and whatever happens to us is part of His plan... 4) we prepare by trusting that He's creating opportunities for us to bear witness...

and He'll give us the words we need - **when** we need them. ... 5) we prepare by learning to endure hardship so that when greater hardship comes... we don't fall by the wayside. ... 6) we prepare by refusing to allow ourselves to buy the lie... that the things of this world are the most important things. And... 7) we prepare by praying each day for God's strength to face whatever the last six miles of life may hold for us.

These are the things that we see in today's rather lengthy passage – known as the “Mt Olivet Discourse.” ... But before we turn to it... let me explain a few things about this kind of prophecy... so we can glean the most from it.

It is easier to understand... when we grasp how divine history was read by the Jews... as well as the prophets. By that... I mean... they believed God's judgment always followed certain **patterns**. The way God would bless or judge His people during one period of time... (usually an event within the generation of the prophet speaking about it)... had strong similarities... to how He was going to bless or judge a future generation. One event... in the prophet's immediate generation... is going to mirror another event of a **future** generation. So prophets often gave their prophecies... by speaking of two separate events where He either blesses or judges... and the two events share the same pattern.

You know what this does...? As the immediate generation sees the first event come true... it provides certainty to the future event **also** being fulfilled. Just as the first part was fulfilled... be certain that the second part will also be fulfilled.

But sometimes the two events are described in a way... that a reader who does not understand this... would not readily notice. They don't see it as two events... but as one-and-the-same.

It is important that **we** acknowledge this... because this is exactly what Jesus does in today's passage. As He assumes the role of a prophet... He employs the very tactic that God had the ancient prophets employ. ... And the event that Jesus **first** spoke of... **did** indeed happen... about 40 years after He spoke it. ... So now... **we** can be just as certain about the fulfillment of the second part.

What we will read first... is Jesus' description of what His listeners... I'm sure... NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS... thought would happen. ... This would have been devastating... (unthinkable)... news to them. ... (LISTEN...) *Jerusalem will be destroyed and not one stone of the Temple would be left on top of another...* But this horrible event did take place... making more certain for you and I... that the second coming of Christ and the events surrounding it... will happen.

Lets now read Jesus' two-part prophetic... and most certain Word... "The Mount Olivet Discourse"...

### **Luke 21:5-6**

Many of our national symbols of pride... give us a false sense that they... and what they represent... will be around forever. Can you imagine how an ancient Babylonian or how an ancient Aztec... Egyptian... Greek... or Roman... might have looked at their structures (which no longer exist)... and probably thought their glory would endure forever...? Even the structures around yours and my life today... can be seen from delusions of

immortality. We can think they will be around forever. ... The Temple... which the Disciples marveled at... created such an impression... We know from the writing from that time period...(Josephus being one of them...) that it made a deep impression on all who visited it. ... This must have been the thinking of Jesus' disciples... as these Galilean visitors took-in the glory of the Temple and were basquing in the national pride that it brought to every Jew... *"Wow! How magnificent! Look at all the gold and marble..."* (When I read this... it is easy for me to remember how I was... when I first visited Autzen Stadium in Eugene... *"Wow! This is incredible!"*)

But Jesus interrupts their lofty thoughts with a dose of reality. ... In light of what was about to happen – this probably was not where their minds should have been. Jesus is about to die for the sins of the world... and their mind are distracted by what they... (and all of common Jewish society... in all their national pride) thought was important. ... (If I wasn't such a fan of football... I would probably think this way every SuperBowl Sunday. ... I usually wake up to the fact that there are far more **important** things than football... once my favorite teams fall out of their division races.) ... But Jesus tries to startle His disciples onto more important matters.

AND It worked! Immediately they want to know **when**... and **what** to look for as it happens. ... Now... in the other Gospels... as they record this Mount of Olives Discourse... for example Matthew 24... it is more clear that Jesus' disciples also want to know when Jesus will establish Himself as the world's reigning King... "When will Your kingdom come?" ... All this disturbing and impossible-sounding talk about this magnificent Temple's destruction... made them think in terms of a **HUGE** turning point in their

nation's history. The Temple's destruction would be a momentous national event! ... .. *"The BIG plans that God has for our nation is finally here!"* How natural it would be for them to combine such thoughts with their expectations that Jesus would overthrow the Romans... and establish a world rule. That **too** will be a substantial national event. *"...So... Jesus... tell us... when is all this going to happen...? Tonight...? Tomorrow...? Next week...? Next year...?"*

Jesus responds by presenting to them that Jerusalem's overthrow... and His Kingdom **reign** on earth... will be two separate events... that are not all at once... The final part of verse 9 makes this clear... so let's read verses 8 and 9 now...

#### **Luke 21:8-9**

Jesus begins by discussing His coming kingdom... His return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. ... *"The end will not be at once... several things will happen before I come and establish My earthly rule... False messiahs... earthquakes... and wars are going to intensify... that will happen sometime from now..."* He also declares... *"These things **must** take place."*

The world needs to see that it's own systems of government and man-made religion are totally inadequate. Jesus' rule is the **only** answer. The false messiahs... devastating earthquakes... and wars... will unmistakably communicate that there is **no** substitute for the rule of Christ... which is about to come. What could be more telling... that His rule is needed!? Since the Garden of Eden... man has told God that he doesn't need God. This will show how foolish that perpetual attitude has been.

## **Luke 21:10-19**

The call here... is to remain steadfast... hold firm to your faith... because God is very much in control. ... But who is being warned...? Is Jesus warning those who were alive on earth during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... when Christ first spoke these words...? ... Is this warning for us...?

I believe that these words will need to be applied by those who **become** Christians during the Tribulation period. ... My belief is that those of us... who are already followers of Jesus... when Christ raptures the church to be with Him forever... are not going to live through the intensified events that we just read. There are going to be massive soul harvests during the Tribulation period – perhaps some of them will be those who you have personally witnessed to... but they have not yet given their life to Christ. There will be many who come to realize the truth of what we have been telling them... and verse 19 spells out the condition by which those Tribulational saints will be saved...

## **Luke 21:19**

A few years ago when the “Left Behind” book series... and their movies came out... Christians were making VHS tapes... clearly marking them... and leaving them out... for any of their loved ones who would be left behind at the rapture... to find. In those tapes they would point out such verses as this... in hopes that they would see their loved ones in Heaven... because their loved ones held out... they endured... all the way to the end.... And did not bow to the Anti-Christ and his beast. (Those would have been training tapes for the final six miles of the marathon... Unfortunately... there are not a lot of homes today with VHS players to play such a tape.)

What horrible things the Tribulation saints will have to endure! But God promises to enable them to face this severe persecution... and to deliver them from it... whether by giving them words to say in their defense... or by bringing them to Heaven **after** their martyrdom.

After Jesus encourages Tribulation saints to hold fast and assures them of God's enablement and their ultimate protection... Jesus returns to His discussion of the **more immediate** event... the desolation... (or complete destruction)... of Jerusalem.

### **Luke 21:20-24**

This refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman General named Titus and the Roman army he led in a.d. 70... just forty years from the time that Jesus spoke these words. ... This terrible event... was in many respects a "dress rehearsal"... for what **will** happen... at the second event of this prophecy... when Christ returns to rule. ... Just before that... as we read in verses 10-17... Satan is going to vent his anger on Israel... and the believing Gentiles... during the last half of the Tribulation.

Jewish historian (Josephus) claimed that nearly a **million** people were killed by Titus and the Romans... Over 100,000 taken captive... when Jerusalem was desolated. When the Romans arrived... they took up positions surrounding the city... in order to strangle it. Josephus describes that some of the people who lived in the nearby mountains... fled to protect themselves inside Jerusalem's walls... but others heeded the words of Jesus in our passage today... and left the city... "as swimmers deserting a sinking ship." But once the Romans closed off Jerusalem... they would not



allow anyone else to enter or depart. Eventually the people began to starve.

The horror that Jesus predicted for Jerusalem - came... and is a matter of historical fact. ... Josephus writes how Jerusalem's children and young people... swollen from starvation... "roamed like phantoms through the market-places and collapsed wherever their doom overtook them."

This was not the first time Jerusalem would be "trampled down by the Gentiles." The prophecies of Daniel **first** reference the "Period of the Gentiles" when the Babylonians had destroyed the city in 586 b. c. This was when "the times of the Gentiles" **began**. ... This significant period in God's plan... started in Daniel's day... When God gave Daniel visions of 8 different kingdoms that would both control Babylon... and at the same time... oppress Jerusalem. Ever since the days of Daniel... the occupiers of Babylon have continuously occupied (trodden down) Jerusalem. During Jesus' day... it was the Romans... who controlled both. (And... there has **never** been a time in our world's history... since Daniel's era... that the Gentiles who controlled the territory where Babylon was... did not also have control over Jerusalem.) This is still true today with Jerusalem having such a strong Muslim presence... and having to share the Temple Mount with a Mosque. Verse 24 reveals that this period of the Gentiles will end... when Jesus Christ returns to the earth... destroys this Gentile power... and sets up His Own righteous kingdom .

At the end of this "Period of the Gentiles"... which the 1<sup>st</sup> Century desolation the city... and destruction of the Temple was a part of... Jesus **will** return and set up His earthly rule. It is just as certain as the temple's

destruction. It happened... history affirms the words of Christ came true... and so will Jesus' return.

### **Luke 21:25-32**

Virtually everything Christ said here... is from Old Testament material. He summarizes passages like Joel 2:30, 31... Isaiah 13:10... Isaiah 34:4... Ezekiel 32:7... Haggai 2:6, 21... and then we see these images again later on in the New Testament... 2 Peter 3:10-13... Rev. 8:7-13. ... What is important for us to see in all of this... is the end will feature unnatural disasters. ... Cosmic signals — quakes in the heavens... earthly catastrophes... tidal disturbances... chaos — all these are part of his final appearing. ... I know that we are seeing many of these things right now... and as I have shown the adult Sunday School class in Revelation... these things are documented as increasing... this period will be so violent that there will be widespread despair and apprehension.

Then amidst this universal confusion... Jesus will come in shining clouds of glory.... Nations and men of every language will worship Him. This is what the disciples were asking Jesus about. This is what they mistakenly thought was part of Jesus' immediate prediction of the Temple's destruction. ... *It is coming... but not all at once!*"

In verse 32... Jesus may have been referring to the generation that would be alive on earth... at the time all these things take place. ... He was not suggesting that it would take a whole generation to accomplish these things... for they will occur with swiftness once they begin.

However... and perhaps more likely... since the Greek word translated "generation" can also mean "race" ... this could be referring to the people of Israel. It is used this way in three other places in the Gospels. Jesus very well may have been assuring the disciples that... in spite of all the difficulties Israel would endure... the nation would be protected by God and not be destroyed. ... (I think this fits the context here of how this discussion began... with a sense of national pride...) Satan wants to destroy the nation of Israel... but he will not succeed.

### **Luke 34-36**

His first admonition was "Know!" ... and His second was "Watch!"

Both admonitions apply to God's people in every age... though they will have a special meaning for the brand new believers of the Tribulation period. If believers during that *difficult* age will be tempted to yield to the world and the flesh... Christians in this present age of comfort and affluence... must face even greater dangers. ... We today do not know when the trumpet will sound and the voice of the arch-angel calls... and we will meet Christ in the air... so we must remain faithful and be ready.

"Watch!" does not mean to stand around looking for signs. ... It means, "Be awake! ... Be alert! ... Don't get caught unprepared!" ... This admonition carries an appropriate warning for us today... because... as we wait for the Rapture... it is so easy for us to "get weighted down" with the cares of this life and the temptations of the world and the flesh.

During difficult times... it is easy to give up and start living like the unsaved world. ... But we must "watch and pray" ... and resist the temptations around us...

We simply cannot be numbed by all the earthbound... secular voices on television and everywhere we look... that say life will go on and on.

It will not!

All of life is moving toward Christ and His return to rule here on earth.

We are to keep listening for a sound... By the way... the way that I understand our passage today... we are not to be looking for **signs** so much as we are to be listening for a **sound**. The signs are given for the Tribulation saints.

And as we listen... "The grace of God... teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions... and to live self-controlled... upright and godly lives in this present age... while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"

Earlier today we prayed for some tremendously pressing needs of those in our congregation. Those with great need – be encouraged! We have a far greater hope of eternal glory that outweighs our temporary troubles!