

IS THIS THE END?

Luke 21:5-19 Text. Vs. 7 *“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?”*

There’s a saying that goes, *“It’s always darkest before the dawn.”* Now that doesn’t make sense. It’s just as dark when the sun goes down in the West at night until the first light of the sun appears in the East the next morning. Darkness tells you it’s the end of the day. It’s time for rest. Time to take a break from the long day. Then when the dawn breaks, the darkness fades. New light begins a new day. And you’re ready for it. Sometimes! But there are lots of people who don’t have a sense of hope before the dawn. They’re longing for a better life. Because today, they’ll have to look for food, water, shelter, and clothing, again. Then, it’ll start all over the next day! Others may yearn for something emotional, like love and belonging. Some may need something more spiritual to fill their inner darkness. They’re hoping to fill their inner sorrow. They need to fill their empty spaces.

And in our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus said there was a dark time coming. The day would come when the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. And it happened! In 70 AD. by Rome. What Jesus said was blasphemous. *“Destroy the Temple?”* The people were so shocked by what they heard that they wanted to know the exact day it would happen. Or what the signs would be before it happened so they could avoid it. But Jesus told them, *“Be on your guard. Make sure you’re not deceived by someone claiming to be a Messiah.”* He told them there would be a lot of things that were going to happen. The Temple was but a small part of what was coming. He told them not to be afraid, for out of the ruins something greater would come. And what was coming wouldn’t be the end. It would be the beginning of a new day.

You know how sometimes things in your life aren’t going the way you think they should. So, you get “down in the dumps.” You begin thinking about all the negative things so much you miss the point Jesus was making. He promised that one day He would return. And all the things of which He spoke about they will already have gone through. It will be time to turn the page when they will then be looking toward eternal glory in God’s Kingdom. Their salvation would be complete! Of course, this was prophecy. It was about the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. But as this passage of Scripture develops, The Temple is merely the beginning of a series of misfortunes. One catastrophe will merge into another.

The Temple disaster is a prelude to the great and final encounter that will end human history. *Armageddon!* A decisive battle between the forces of good and evil. The battle for which the world is waiting. But it hasn’t happened, yet! The wars and uprisings Jesus talked about may just be small conflicts. But when He said, *‘nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom’* it refers to bigger conflicts in which nations and kingdoms powerfully seek their own interests. So far, America has had her role as *“defender of the free world.”* But Jesus said there will be natural disasters on earth and heaven. *“There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places. And fearful events and great signs from heaven.”* Not only will there be earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. There will be hurricanes, tornadoes, and pandemics. COVID 19. Polio. HIV. AIDS. And as we respond to one, another one breaks out! Yes, Jesus was talking about *‘fearful events and great signs.’*

Last year was the hottest year recorded since we began measuring temperature on earth. Global warming. Fearful events may come with the colliding of asteroids into Earth. A black hole in the universe that may swallow everything up. Or is it something else? Is North Korea going to send missiles into Japan, South Korea, or the U.S.? Is China going to dominate the world? Will Russia drop the atomic bomb? Will there be a World War III? Our veterans, who we are recognizing today and thanking for their faithful service to our country in World War II, Korea, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan to name a few - we thank you for your service. But will you have to do it again? You say you’re too old. You’ve been there and done that! True! But what about our youth coming behind us? Will they have to do it?

Listen again to verses 10 and 11? *“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”* This is a spiritual battle. It has been raging since the beginning of time. In whatever battlefield God has placed us we have taken on the forces of darkness. Or it may have been confronting political corruption here at home. It may be a relational breakdown in families. It may be that you’ve gotten your hands so full struggling with the darkness within your own soul that your battles just run easily into the next. But it all has to happen! It’s all part of what leads up to what Jesus was talking about in vs. 19. *“Stand firm, and you will win life.”* Each time you stand firm, God will strengthen you for your next battle. And by doing that, you will be a true witness for Jesus by strengthening other believers. Showing that following Jesus doesn’t mean judging others just because they never achieved their potential in life. It means working against evil forces until the end of time when evil forces will be exposed by persecuting believers. That’s right! You may be imprisoned. You may be tried before kings and governors. It happened to Jesus. It happened to the apostle Paul. It happened to the disciples. And Jesus said it will happen to all believers. Because in John 15:18-20 Jesus said, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world. But I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you. If they obeyed My teaching, they will obey yours also.”*

Jesus said your persecution will be *'on account of my name.'* Believers will be persecuted because of Jesus' name. But when that time comes, Jesus will help His people. Don't worry how you will defend yourself.

Look at verses 14-15. *"¹⁴Make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."* That's Jesus' promise! He will defend his people when the time of persecution comes! He will put His words on their lips! They will have words and wisdom that none of their enemies will be able to resist or contradict! Religious leaders who tried to persecute Jesus could not, because of His wisdom and words. For example, He said, *'give to Caesar what is Caesar's. And to God what is God's.'* *'For God is not the God of the dead but of the living.'* *'If anyone is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.'* He will give words of wisdom to people who will be persecuted just as He was. And when that happens, Jesus will identify Himself to you.

Many things are going to happen in the future over which you have no control. The coming of false Messiahs. Temptations. Wars. Conflicts among nations. Natural disasters. Persecutions of believers. Persecutions by family members. And when all those things happen, your natural response will be for you to lose heart. To give up. To stop talking about Jesus. But Jesus asked you to *stand firm*. A lady invited a friend to church the next morning for her to hear God's message. She declined. "Oh, I can't come tomorrow. It's supposed to rain." The woman who invited her reminded her that it wouldn't be raining on Judgment Day! Listen, when your life on Earth is over, there's no escaping it. No excuses. Rain or no rain. You're going to go. And it's written in the Bible, that righteousness is as *"filthy rags."*

Now, think about that. The reason Jesus died for you is because no sin is allowed in Heaven! Did you hear that? *No sin is allowed in Heaven!* That's why Jesus had to pay the price on the cross for your sins, because He was sinless. He was perfect. He was blameless. He was the only sacrifice to be offered to God in your place that would be acceptable. That's the only thing that will allow you to share a place Heaven with Him one day. Your life isn't the end! Your faith in Jesus Christ is what gives you a new beginning! It will be a life in heaven that will never end. Think about that. All you have to do to receive that eternal life is to believe it! So, you better prepare and be ready for it. Remember what Jesus said, *"not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹Stand firm, and you will win eternal life."* Stand firm! Stand firm! Believe, *"and you will win eternal life."* AMEN