

Luke 21:5-38

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 March 2015

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Today's scripture reading comes from Luke chapter 21 verses 5 through 38 and may be found on page 880 of the Blue Bibles. At this time the children from age 3 through 2nd grade may be dismissed for big picture kids.

They'll meet their teachers right at this back door and can be picked up afterward at their class down the hall. Again the scripture reading is Luke 21 5 through 38 page 880.

Would you please stand with me for the reading of God's word. And while some were speaking of the temple how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings he said as for these things that you see the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

And they asked him teacher when will these things be and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place. And he said see that you are not led astray for many will come in my name saying I am he and the time is at hand.

Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults do not be terrified for these things must first take place but the end will not be at once. Then he said to them nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

[1 : 22] There will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and pestilences and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer for I will give you a mouth and a wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake but not a hair of your head will perish.

By your endurance you will gain your lives. But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies then know that its desolation has come near.

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains and let those who are inside the city depart and let not those who are out in the country enter it. For these are days of vengeance to fulfill all that is written.

[2 : 39] Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days. For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations.

And Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars and on the earth distress of nations and perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves.

People fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on in the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near. And he told them a parable.

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

[3 : 51] Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life. And that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man.

And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning, all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, occasionally a preacher runs into a biblical text that requires shifting the perspective of the people who are listening before he can state the practical meaning or apply it in ways of normal, everyday living.

[5 : 22] Today is one such day. These kinds of texts are especially prevalent when the genre is apocalyptic.

Apocalyptic. And there are elements in our text of apocalyptic, which is not only unfamiliar to most of us, but it always seems to cut across the grain of being able to get a handle on it.

The text before us has a complexity, not merely the length of the reading, but a complexity that befuddles Western modern day readers.

You probably had trouble staying with Jesus and Luke, even though the reading was clear. It seems to bounce around.

Might have a handle on it at the beginning, but somewhere halfway or two-thirds of the way through, not sure where we are anymore. A bit like Dylan's now ancient line, something's happening here and you don't know what it is, do you?

[6 : 34] By the time you get to verse 32, the average Christian or listener to the text throws up their hands in despair. How is it that all these things take place in 30 to 40 years when we've been speaking about things that cascade to the very end of time?

Our minds, in approaching the text, are befuddled. There's a reason for this. By training, we are a linear people, especially when it comes to recording history.

Just pick up a biography on any of the bookshelves today over at 57th Street Books. It'll bear this out. The life of the individual covered in the book often comes with a page or two given to sketching out a timeline of the subject's life.

A date and year are given first, followed by an entry indicating that they were born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, or such and such a city.

And then that's followed by an entry indicating something significant, the lines of their life, events, accomplishment, schools attended, persons met, married, accolades.

[7 : 56] And then last, the last line records the date of the subject's passing. The reader is never confused, always in command of where things are as a matter of record.

The same and simple way of recording history is in any modern history textbook. I mean, pull a book off the shelf on World War II. Probably before the beginnings or after it ends, there'll be a page or two appendix.

You'll find a chart. And all the significant dates of the war and all the military appointments and the key battles fought will be laid out for you, chronologically, sequentially clear.

All is a matter of record. And the last entry will be the day and the place where the signed armistice finally put an end to hostilities.

That's history for us. And that's our trouble with Luke and Jesus. A singular telling of things from the beginning to the end is not the way the text is given.

[9 : 03] In our text, two separate things are brought along together. And they are things literally distanced by thousands of years.

On one hand, the destruction of the temple, you'll see the text opens with it. Indeed, even the city of Jerusalem. And in verse 7, the question is asked of Jesus, when will these things be?

That is, when this temple that I'm looking at will be destroyed. And yet, their question went on, and when will the sign be that these are about to take place?

And for that half of the question, Jesus expands the sign from the temple in nearness of proximity in first century to the very end of the age.

And as the text moves on, these two are woven fine, never pulled apart, which is what you and I would have done if someone had asked us the question, when is the temple going to be destroyed, and what are the signs for the end of the age?

[10:16] Well, we would say in our lecture, first, let me treat the temple destruction. And we would move from A to Z. And after 30 minutes of conversation, we would move to the second question.

Not so for Jesus. Not so for Luke. Not so for apocalyptic literature. Here, the fall of Jerusalem and the fixed signs for the end of the world are entwined seamlessly, effortlessly even.

These two events weave in and out of one another until the end. They nearly appear to be one and the same thing. The fall of the city in verse 32 stands for the fall of the entire world at the end of time.

If you don't get a hold of that, there's no way to press home the practical application of the text. Let me see if I can get it where you can reach it.

Jerusalem was destroyed at the hands of Titus in 70 A.D. And for Luke and Jesus, that moment modeled the end of the world and in some sense was the end of the world.

[11:43] There's a conflation of both. Let me put a picture on it. If you asked a Brit, when did World War II end? They might say, oh, that's easy.

With an accent, of course. That's V-E Day. May 8th, 1945, that's when Germany made its unconditional surrender, when Europe had victory.

Hitler had committed suicide about a week before. If you asked a modern-day citizen in Tokyo, when did World War II end?

They might say, oh, that would be V-J Day, August 15th, 1945. August 15th, 1945. Bombs had been dropped on two of our cities and unconditional surrender shortly followed.

But if you asked an American soldier the same question, they might say, no, those dates don't take into effect the reality. The end of the war came much earlier.

[12:50] D-Day. D-Day. June 6th, 1944, when Normandy Beach was taken. In one sense, all three individuals answering the question concerning when World War II ended can be considered correct, as well as faithful in matters of history.

In the same way, Luke takes the destruction of Jerusalem, like a Normandy man, and says everything had taken place, even in that very event.

He had no trouble understanding the destruction of the first to be the end of the latter. And until you understand that way of reading, you're looking for chronological sequencing and will always be confused in regard to the chapter.

So they're woven, fine, in and out, seamlessly, from one to the other, back and forth, forward.

And so it is. Verses 5-9. Clearly the content speaks to the destruction of the temple.

[14:20] While they were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offering, He said, As for these things you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

And they considered that. And indeed, Jesus says to them, See that you are not led astray. Many will come in My name, saying, I am He, and the time is at hand.

Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not be at once. It is almost as if He has already brought the very end of the age together with the destruction of Jerusalem.

It would be a bit like watching 24, if you have ever seen Jack Bauer. Before the commercial breaks, the screen goes to split screen. You are watching one individual scene, and another box carries another one, and you have to track both at once.

For they both relate to the story as a whole, and that is what He is doing here. When will the temple fall? And He begins His answer, and immediately another box is set beside it.

[15:30] It is related to the very end of the age. For the falling of one is the other, and the other is modeled in the falling of the one. And so He turns to the signs of the age, the end of the age, verse 10, nation will rise against nation.

He is now peering into the distant future, kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines, and pestilences, and there will be tears and great signs from heaven.

This look all the way forward, which you and I know now to be true, for indeed, the earth writhes with these natural events.

And a famine in one place gives way to a famine in another. And a pestilence in one place gives way to pestilence in another. And a disease in one corner now brings fear upon the whole world, for it can travel in a plane and arrive on your street at a moment's notice.

But then He pulls them back. Verse 12, But before all this, they'll lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you'll be brought before kings and governors for My name's sake.

[16:55] This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it, therefore, in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you, they will put to death. You'll be hated by all for My name's sake.

Not a hair of your head will perish for your endurance. You will gain your lives. When will these things happen?

His answer is underway. But the point He is pressing home is this. Expect persecution. They want to know when, and He lands on what to expect.

It's not going to all happen at once, but expect persecution. And this is the history of the church before the fall of Jerusalem and long beyond.

[18:02] I think of the great Apostle Paul standing there on the Ostian Way at a time under Nero in that early persecution moment where Nero was placing Christians in a sense, encasing them in wax, lighting them for the night light, or sewing them in animal garments and bringing them for destruction.

I think of Paul himself beheaded, laid his head down, made his prayers, and offered himself up. Peter upside down.

The church. Stephen. And beyond. And beyond. To the present day. 21 Coptic Christians. Hundreds. In Syria. Thousands, if we added it up, across all the continents. We stand in America. In the West. Largely, to this point in history, protected. For now some hundreds of years in regard to our faith, but already seeing the signs on the horizon and the coming of persecution for the name of Christ.

[19:30] I was in Cuba two weeks ago. Saw the kind of economic and vocational oppression that can come as a result of the gospel. A country closed since 1959.

Atheistic in orientation. Communistic in regard to its social structures. I met a Christian man who was a university professor.

Came to know Christ in the mid-90s and began attending a house Bible study. Eventually felt himself wanting to explain the scriptures and opened up his own home.

Began to explain the word. Government officials found out. Fired him from his university professorship. His wife, who had done all the training in medical school to practice medicine. Relinquished from any ability to practice law. Their land confiscated. Their house no longer their own. 80-90% of what it would produce now going to somebody else.

[20:35] If you have 20 chickens, someone comes in the morning and grabs 16 of them. Now, from the top to the bottom, vocational, economic, persecution, simply in that case on the basis of his religious profession in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's all over the world. Jesus, through Luke's hand, says concerning the signs at the end, you can expect persecution.

And so what does the Christian community need to do? Even now, as we prepare to live and worship him, we need to pledge ourselves to the gospel no matter the cost.

We need to align ourselves in the gospel for those who are bearing the cost. This last week, I was in Dallas.

Found out that Keith Green was buried about 10 miles from where I was. Now, most of you probably don't know who Keith Green is. It meant a lot to those of us growing up in the 70s.

[22:05] Hey, I brought Andre Crouch in a couple weeks ago. I might as well bring Keith in today. I went to the cemetery. He died in a plane crash in July of 1982.

I won't forget where I was on the road when I heard it with his two-year-old and his one-year-old daughter, Bethany, and Josiah's boy died with him playing that he was flying right near his home. And the last day's newsletter, Ministries, which I got growing up, all that came to a crashing halt. Keith Green's music ministered to me growing up.

He had that song, And I pledge my head to heaven for the gospel. Then he pledged his wife to heaven for the gospel.

Then he pledged his son singing, singing, Oh, no matter whatever the cost, I'm going to count all things lost.

[23 : 19] That's what my heart needed this week. It's easy to forget. the end of the age has come. The world has been destroyed and will be destroyed.

The Christian community can expect persecution. It needs men and women and children who understand the times, who are not surprised, who don't run from it.

My, how is it that we are so surprised when these words written down so long ago tell us to expect persecution?

He moves. Verse 20, But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that the desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Let those who are inside the city depart and let none of those who are out of the country get in for these days or days of vengeance to fulfill all that is written. I think that's probably a clear indication to the prophetic discourse in Daniel that expects the destruction of all of this.

[24 : 35] He says, Woe to those who are nursing infants in those days. Great distress will come upon the earth. The edge of the sword. Nations, Jerusalem itself will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

I'm not sure exactly what to make of the last phrase. Perhaps it's intended to be ambiguous. Perhaps until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled, meaning salvation will come to those who are persecuting the Jews through whom salvation came, but it could also simply mean that their own judgment is coming.

All of this is a matter of historical record. Go to the library and look at Josephus, the historian. They've marked it out.

Did you know that when Titus came and burned Jerusalem and overran the temple and desecrated it with an abomination of desolation, there were false prophets at the time?

Josephus records it. Prophets who told all the people, get up to the temple. The deliverer will keep you safe there, even though the words of the text say, get out of the city and run.

[25 : 50] He records that over 6,000 headed to the temple, women and children mostly, destroyed as the city fell.

They said that while the fires were rising with great strength in the city, it was only overwhelmed by the blood that was flowing. the Romans carried standards into the sanctuary at the east gate.

They sacrificed to them. They took the gold from the temple. The priests were executed by Titus. All is a matter of historical record. And for Luke, think of it as D-Day.

For on that day, it was all done. We're playing it out until the end of time. He moves, verse 25, again, almost as if he moves from that first century moment and then conflates it into an end of the time move.

There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars on the earth, distress of nations and perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves. Did you notice the contrast between verse 11, where everything seems to do with the land and famine and pestilence and now the waves and the water itself, the roaring of the seas and people fainting with fear and foreboding on what is coming on the world.

[27 : 23] This is exactly what's happening today and has been happening for hundreds and thousands of years. The heavens will be shaken and then he will come in a cloud with power and great glory and obvious sign to the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

His return. Interestingly, last week we saw the scribes ask that question about the eternal future even though they didn't believe in it themselves. And Jesus followed with his own question about the rejection of his eternal past because they didn't believe in that either.

And he condemned them for all they lived for was the present holding up the widow as one who gave everything she had to say in the present I will trust in God. Now he says he is coming.

He will come. As it was in the beginning is now and evermore shall be all time collapsing.

Collapsing. Under the lordship of Jesus the Nazarene crucified dead, buried, risen, ascended, ruling, even now at the right hand asking his family to go through the very waters that he walked through.

For this is our opportunity to bear witness. What a great literary phrase in 28.

[29 : 00] Straighten up. Straighten up. Raise up your heads. Redemption is drawing near. He closes with a parable and an application that fits their time as well as ours.

The parable of a fig tree already now coming to leave. Probably a representation of Israel itself. in apocalyptic terms.

Things are ripe for the end. I was at court theater a few weeks ago watching the stage rendition of Beckett's Waiting on Godot.

In act two, the barren tree has somehow sprouted leaves and they're waiting and they're waiting and Godot does not show. That little suffix ending on the word God.

They're waiting for some diminutive meaning. Just give me something to get along with in the world. Jesus has made it clear and Luke has as well.

[30 : 23] He is returning. Summer is drawing near. So be prepared. All of this will take place. Heaven and earth will pass away.

These words I'm giving to you, says Jesus, will not. And then the application is there for you and for me. Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of life and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

Just as in the first half we were to expect persecution so the application in the latter half is to persevere in expectation. Think of the words that are given here.

This dissipation, this drunken revelry, this partying of life that so easily takes place when you don't know where life is moving. Think of the word there for drunkenness, meth, way, just meth.

I mean, think of the culture in which we live which self-medicates its way through life because we have not seen its clear and decisive end in Christ.

[31 : 38] Think of the cares of life which the text says and how burdensome it is or as it's used elsewhere in scripture the desire to have riches so that one can somehow be anesthetized from the long wait.

These are all here. Put a man or a woman here on their own night by night, week after week, wondering where it's all moving.

No wonder we go to the bottle. No wonder we go to some self-medicating addictions that take time away.

No wonder we forget to be laboring faithfully, productively, like kingdom men and women. This is what he says.

When are all these things going to be? He says, well, persevere in expectation. Don't allow yourself to exit before your time.

[32 : 53] Look what he says to him there. Stay awake, verse 36, at all times praying that you might have strength.

Is this so true? I was thinking in my own life this week of how unfruitful I can be when I lose perspective that the end has come and that I am to count all things as loss and to remain vigilantly attuned to my life, my ways, my work.

It says here to be in prayer. I think of Keith Green again just because I was standing over, I was six feet over his bones this week and I wept over that grave and said this is resurrection ground, there's going to be a day when this soil gives way and saints rise and stand before the Son of Man on that day and his words, his music just flooded my mind.

My eyes are dry, my faith is old, my heart is hard, my prayers are cold. Oh, I know how I ought to be alive to you and dead to me.

I mean, just single one syllable words that fashion a new perspective on life.

[34 : 50] My eyes are too dry. my faith even now only at the age of 53 because of the cares of the world and the loss of perspective can at times be too old.

My heart which at times is burned bright sometimes can be too hard.

Prayers become cold. the text would fall upon us today and simply say the end has come.

Expect persecution. Persevere in expectation. Strengthen your drooping knees. Stand upright. Stay away from the things that anesthetize you to a reality that is less than what we have heard from the word today.

Be prepared that when he comes he finds you doing what you are to be doing. Or if he takes you, he wouldn't regret the moment he came and got you. Oh, for a church that can learn to wait and wait well.

[36 : 16] our heavenly father upon us the end of the ages has come.

Strengthen us even through the table to run this week in alignment with your leading. For in you is life.

And we come to Christ forward in Jesus' name. Amen. Paul says, For I received from the Lord what I delivered to you. That the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as you drink it in remembrance of me.

To all who have confessed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and are waiting for the salvation found in his return may this meal strengthen you to live as though the world had already ended and you pledged yourself to him in fresh ways.

[37 : 49] If you have not accepted Christ then the meal doesn't make sense for you. But I'm telling you the drunken revelry and the meth and the rest will not sustain you.

So sit and watch as these aisles are filled with people from every age and race and ask yourself when will the day be when you partake of life which is life indeed.

The gifts of God for the people of God. God