

Prepping for the End

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[0 : 0 0] Let me add my welcome as well. And if you've just joined us this week, we are beginning our final run to the end of the Gospel of Luke. Those of you who have been here at 5 o'clock for the last few years, I think this is our fifth year.

And as was with Genesis and Exodus, we do them over about two years. But God willing, we will end with the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday.

Woo! So put that in your diaries to be here. Now I hope I'm not triggering anyone when I say this, but I'm pretty sure that most of you know what it's like to have to prep for an exam, school exam. Some of you might be a long time ago, can't remember a single thing about it. But for others, it's only too raw. You're probably unsure when you're preparing for this exam what will come out on the paper.

And you're wanting to know there's so much to study, what to focus on. And so you love those teachers or lecturers, don't you, that give you a hint as to what may come out.

[1 : 0 9] Maybe they'll tell you to look at the past papers or something. Or they'll tell you, you know, hint, hint, or keep repeating a certain word all the time in the lecture, so that you get the idea that perhaps that might come up in the exam.

My principal at Ridley, Peter Adam, used to give us the precise questions that will be on the exams. You think, wow, great. We had two hours to answer three questions.

Of course, he didn't just give us three questions, but he gave us eight possible questions. And he said that five will be on the exam, and you have to answer three.

Now, for those of you trying to work out, how many do we have to study? No, six. If you want to be sure to at least be able to answer three, you need to only do six, right?

Because, you know, three out of five, two you don't really have to worry about. Get that? Yeah, okay. Anyway, as we return to finish off the Gospel of Luke, we find that Jesus is nearing the cross, and as he does, he's prepping his disciples as well for an exam, but it's the end time exams that he's prepping them for.

[2 : 2 2] His time with them is getting short, and he's preparing them for a time when he's no longer with them physically. But the passage begins in verse five with the disciples being rather distracted as they're looking at the temple.

You can imagine them probably with a camera around their necks or their GoPro, and they're looking at the temple. And so some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple, how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with the gifts dedicated to God.

Now, I'm not sure exactly what this says about them, but perhaps it reflected their desire for stability. No doubt they've realized that the temple that they're looking at has been destroyed before.

This is the second temple. But the grandeur of it and the precious stones used in it must have given them a sense of permanence and probably an assurance that here it was that it's evidence of God's ongoing presence and protection of his people.

But Jesus uses this context to tell them not to be deceived. And he says, next slide, As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another.

[3 : 3 7] Every one of them will be thrown down. Teacher, they ask, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they're about to take place? He replied, Watch out that you are not deceived, for many will come in my name claiming I am he, and the time is near.

Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.

Now, before we go much further, I need to explain that Jesus here is speaking firstly to the disciples about their situation in their time. Now, we may see similarities with our own situation and be tempted to apply them directly to us.

But the first step is to really hear Jesus' words to them in their situation. So, some of the things that Jesus says here is really specifically only for them, particularly as we understand that they will become apostles in the church.

But then, having understood how it applies to them, we can then take out and draw principles which then apply to us. It can be tricky to distinguish between the two, but hopefully when we get to the end of today, you'll be able to see clearly which is which, or how, even though it's applied to them, the principles apply to us.

[5 : 08] So, to begin with, the first hint or tip that Jesus gives to his disciples is, as I say on the outline, that they are to expect upheaval in the world. So, on the next slide, he says, nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom.

There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. Now, it may sound like what we're going through right now, but actually, if you think about it, it was actually no different in the days of the disciples.

In fact, if you look throughout history, this has always been the case. We've always had these things in our lives, in the world. So, you might ask, how is then this an indication of the end?

Well, Jesus says it's not. Throughout history, as I say, there will be times of upheaval, but this doesn't mean the end has come. It is coming, but Jesus says the end is not here yet.

But what happens usually when these sort of things happen, when we have upheaval, is that the number of false messiahs and doomsday prophets increase.

[6 : 21] They increase because such crises cause people to want to seek ways to soothe their anxieties and fears. And so, they play into the hands of these peoples who offer false promises of salvation.

And the people are drawn to them, are tempted to follow them because they're impatient, aren't they? They want their anxieties and their fears to be solved straight away. And so, here they hear someone say, promise some quick solution, and immediately, they follow.

Well, Jesus warns them not to be fooled. The end isn't near yet. At the same time, he tells them not to be afraid because these things must happen.

And in addition, Jesus now says, those who follow Jesus will also be persecuted. And so, that's the second hint or heads up which Jesus gives. And on the next slide, he says, But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you.

They will hand you over to the synagogues and put you in prison. And you will be brought before kings and governors and all on account of my name. And so, you will bear testimony to me. Great disaster will be for all humans.

[7 : 33] But for Christians and the disciples, they will have the added trial of persecution. But again, Jesus assures them that there is a purpose for this. The reason why this is happening to them, or God is allowing that to happen, is so that they will bear witness or bear testimony to Jesus.

In other words, Jesus is saying, this is actually your time to shine. Or to use the words of Daniel's prophecy in chapter 12, verse 3, to shine like the brightness of heaven and like stars to lead many to righteousness.

Often with human nature, the tendency is to try and lie low, isn't it? To try and ride it out. But Jesus says, no, don't react like that because such times are coming to you so that you can be my witnesses.

So, they need to make up their minds, verse 14, to stand up for him. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves, Jesus says.

For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed, even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.

[8 : 53] Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm and you will win life. Now, as I said earlier, I think these promises are specifically for the apostles.

And if you read the book of Acts, you see that play out because they are brought before the Jewish and Roman authorities. In which case, I don't think some of what Jesus says here is specifically for us.

So, for example, when he says, not a hair on our head will perish. I don't think that's for me, particularly, as well. But not for you, too, probably.

Neither does it mean that I think that whenever we open our mouths, we will know exactly what to say because God always gives us the right words. In fact, we've seen over the last, you know, few years, or, you know, probably last decade now, we've seen our Coptic brothers and sisters beheaded, haven't they, in the Middle East under the hands of Al-Qaeda.

So these promises obviously didn't come true for them, did it? Nevertheless, I think there are general principles that apply. We see firstly that they apply to the disciples, but then the principles, general principles, apply to us.

[10:15] So, for example, the promise that if we stand firm, we will win life, I think is a promise that we can hold to because that's true for Christians all across the ages.

Standing firm will enable us to win life in eternity. Likewise, even though we may sometimes not say the right words and we might fumble under pressure, yet we can be assured that God will still use us as witnesses, even though we may think we've let him down.

He will give us the strength and the wisdom to stand up for him, even though we may not think that we've done exactly what we ought to have done. So the takeaway from all of this, I think, is that Christians are not to be afraid or to run for cover.

Instead, as Jesus says, we are to make up our minds beforehand, before it happens, not to worry about how we defend ourselves. That is, there is no need to overthink it as to the what-ifs and, you know, if this happens, what will I say?

Because when we do that, we invariably come to the worst-case scenario and we're spooked by it and therefore we, you know, we climb up. No, Jesus says, decide beforehand that you will stand firm, even if you can't foresee everything that will happen to you.

[11:35] Tell yourself that God has put us here for a reason and we've got a job to do that when we're put in such a situation, our job is simply to bear witness to Jesus.

Tell the Lord, pray, ask for the strength to be able to just stand and bear witness when the time comes. We may not know the ins and outs of what we'll do, but trust that God will give us the strength to do it.

Now, the third thing that Jesus now mentions, the third hint, is that in preparing his disciples for the end, all this upheaval and crisis that is going on is in part, Jesus says, God's judgment on the world. They have to realize that. Again, what Jesus does is focus firstly on Jerusalem in the aftermath of his own crucifixion and then beyond that, further afield after he's done that.

So, in verse 20, he focuses on Jerusalem. When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those who are in the country not enter the city.

[12:43] For this is the time of punishment or judgment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers. There will be great distress in the land and wrath against its people.

They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Now, in the history of Jerusalem, the disciples would have realized that the desolation has actually occurred before. So, some 200 years before their time, the Greeks had come into the city of Jerusalem and they had set up an abomination in the temple and therefore desecrated it.

And hence, people of that time have known it to be the desolation of the temple. But now, Jesus is saying that it will happen again. And we know from history that Jerusalem was again destroyed in AD 70 because the Jews, that is the Jews, not the Christians, but the Jews revolted against the Romans.

Now, none of this is outside God's will, Jesus now says, for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of what has been written. God has foretold this before.

[14:00] And if you want to read a bit more, go to Daniel's prophecy, which I quoted earlier. But this time, look at chapter 9 and 11. You see, Israel was being judged in part because they had rejected God's Messiah in Jesus.

But Jesus says that even though you may believe in Jesus, you will still be caught up in it. The disciples are not spared. But because Jesus has warned them, they will be able to see it coming and therefore flee the city and head to the mountains.

So we mustn't be confused by this destruction to flee. It's not that it's the same or inconsistent with the one earlier where Jesus says to stand firm. Because what's happening here is that Christians are not being targeted for their faith.

This revolt, this destruction of Jerusalem is not aimed at them. And so God is saying he's providing warning so that when the time comes, they can flee. They can go to the mountains to take refuge. The judgment that God was bringing was on the city of Jerusalem and the authorities in them because they had put their security falsely on the temple. And God was demonstrating by that judgment how it was so wrong.

[15:15] Which is why I think Jesus at the very start told his disciples not to admire the temple because God's presence is no longer found there but in his sign Jesus. So that was the instruction for them to take refuge and it's different to when they are persecuted to stand firm.

It's a different situation. Now notice as well you might have wondered what it meant but there's a cryptic reference there as well to Jerusalem being trampled upon until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

And there are a couple of views on this. The first is to take the reference to the Gentiles as that of the Roman Empire. And we know that after Rome the Roman Empire in particular became a Christian and we entered the period of Christendom Jerusalem was rebuilt.

So it was trampled on and then rebuilt when the Romans or the Gentiles became Christians. That is one way of looking at it. But the other way of thinking about it is that the times of the Gentiles could refer to the ingathering of the Gentiles into God's kingdom.

And if you read Romans chapter 15 Paul talks about it in these terms so that the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled coincides with the end of this age of Christ returning once this is complete.

[16:34] We are the Gentiles that are currently being gathered and it's our time as it were the times of the Gentiles that are being fulfilled. So it could be the first or it could be the second or it could be both even but either way Jesus what Jesus does now is next cast his vision further afield in verse 25.

His focus now is taken beyond Jerusalem and is taken beyond the first century AD. And what he says is there will be signs in the sun moon and stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.

People will faint from terror apprehensive of what is coming on the world for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory. When these things begin to take place stand firm and lift up your heads. Stand up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near. Now I think a lot of this imagery here are allusions to the Old Testament.

So look at the prophecy of Joel for example and you'll read some of that. And so I think we're not to see all of this as being literal literally fulfilling being fulfilled. So the tossing of the sea doesn't mean every time you go down to the beach at Bell's Beach and there's a big wave that this is being fulfilled.

[17:51] No. It's more apocalyptic. Alright. Not literally. But the point is Jesus' point is that throughout history there will be signs of turmoil and upheaval.

And in this case he's referring to the turmoil that's in the cosmos as it were or creation not just earthly events. But again while this image or these visions may be terrifying Jesus' purpose of bringing them up is actually not to cause us to fear but actually to encourage us.

For he says that when these things begin to occur then we are to know that salvation is near. Anytime soon the Son of Man will descend from the clouds and eternity will be ushered in.

So when these things happen we are to take comfort because we are to go wow the Son of Man might just be coming. Now we're pretty good at spotting the seasons.

So when you see the falling at the shops what do you think is coming up? I know they put it up on Boxing Day.

[19:07] It's not the New Year. It's Easter. Yes. Likewise when Woolies puts up this display what's around the corner? Halloween.

Yes. Whether you want to celebrate or not. And then when Maya starts stocking and selling these things it's time to hang up set up your Christmas tree because Christmas is around the corner.

Yes. So we're pretty good at these right? And just so you know Jesus didn't have these festivals during his time. But he did have trees and one of them the fig tree is seasonal.

Alright. And so he uses it as an illustration here in verse 29. He goes on to tell them a parable. He said look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.

Even so when you see these things happening you know that the kingdom of God is near. What Jesus is saying is that likewise for us when we see the signs all around us of war of pestilence of famines of earthquakes know that the time is near.

[20 : 18] Now you may then say but you just told us that these things happen all the time. How is it that then it is a sign that things are near? Well precisely.

Because what you need to understand is what Jesus is saying here is that these signs are not clues for us to spot when the timing of his return is going to be rather it is to help us realize that it can happen any time soon and that this has been the case for the last two thousand years.

All Christians whatever the time need to be preparing for the end. Ever since Jesus has arisen and gone up to heaven the time has always been near.

That's what he's saying. Our job isn't to pick the time but actually to be constantly ready. Can you see the difference? Now you may be disappointed by hearing that because you might feel like you're that little boy waiting at the front door for daddy to come home from work as he promised so that he can take you to kick a footy and he never shows up.

Right? But that's not the situation that we're in or we're supposed to imagine ourselves in. Instead we're more like firefighters who are always ready to fight any fire should the call come.

[21 : 47] We're waiting we're alert at the station yes we can sit around and play cards while we wait but at any moment even though we don't know when the call may come we are to be prepared and we're to be prepared even though as I'm sure many of the firefighters wish the call for a fire never comes right?

That's how we're meant to be seeing this warning or this sort of exhortation from Jesus and that's why in the final verses of our passage Jesus' instruction for the disciples is to be prepared doesn't turn on when they're to be ready but on how they're to be ready all the time alright it's not about when they're to be ready but how they're to be ready all the time so in verse 32 Jesus says truly I tell you this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away so if you look at the outline the first point the first thing to do is that the disciples are to mark his words that is take heed of everything he's taught them not just in relation to the end times but to everything he's taught them for God's word is eternal and enduring and relevant throughout all time it speaks to both the early Christians back then with the disciples as well as to us today and it will keep speaking to us as we live our lives going forward and so second having taken heed of

God's word we are to live carefully Jesus goes on to say be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing drunkenness and the anxieties of life and that they will close on you suddenly like a trap for it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth be always on the watch and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen and that you may be able to stand before the son of man now it's interesting isn't it because when you talk to many people they think that the whole idea of drinking and carousing is to lighten their lives right it's been a hard week let's go and have a drink to ease our burdens but look what Jesus says here he says that drinking drunkenness and carousing actually weighs us down it's easy to understand how anxieties of life weigh us down but drunkenness and carousing Jesus says weighs us down as well now before I go on I want to say I don't think Jesus means here we're never to celebrate a birthday party that you can't go and have a drink on the weekend and sort of those kind of no he's not saying that you can't do these things rather he's referring to our way of life he's talking about living as though this is all life is about and so we can be weighed down can't we at both ends on the one hand by the anxieties of life which we know about but on the other hand we can be weighed down by the preoccupation with pleasure and enjoyment as though that's all that is to life both make us lose focus on what's important that this age is it helps us or it causes us to be so consumed by things in this world that we don't prepare for the age to come and be ready when it does come now again I'm not saying Jesus is saying you need to pack your bags for heaven and leave it at the front door and wait there 24 7 no it's okay to plan for your life like in your relationships what you do for work where you live it's okay to plan and to go ahead with some of these plans what Jesus is saying though is we must do it however with the right mindset with the mindset of having the right priorities and realizing that all these things that we are doing is really only for this age and actually when the

age to come arrives we need to be prepared for that rather than we only focus on what is here and that's why Jesus says in verse 36 always be watchful this means not just being careful but being careful all the time doing it constantly and consistently and coupled with that is the instruction to be prayerful why because prayerfulness allows you to be watchful as well being prayerful is to be watchful when we pray we're constantly bringing to mind

God's word and promises we're asking him to help us to resist temptation and to be faithful in other words praying helps us to be watchful and so Jesus says to them pray that they'll all that happens and to be found standing when he comes and did you notice the three times that Jesus talks about standing firm standing up and lifting our heads and standing before the son of man there's a theme isn't there that what we're to do is to stand firm not run away but be on guard as well and being watchful standing now as Christians in Australia I don't think our persecution will be like that of the disciples but we might still be in one sense rejected or ostracized in our community and we will have challenges other challenges as well don't we of health or relationships there will be a lot of things that will tempt us to take our eyes of

[27 : 37] Jesus to live as though his coming isn't imminent and I suppose even if Jesus doesn't come right away there's no telling that we wouldn't depart earth anytime soon either that's right isn't it just over the last two or three weeks three people at the age of 52 had a heart attack Shane Wan Senator Kitching and I think it's Dean Wallace an AFL guy thankfully he survived now I don't think there's anything magic about turning 52 by the way but it goes to show that life is short isn't it that's the warning I know a lot of you have been wanting to know this but I turned 50 recently and you know my wife encouraged me to go and have a checkup with my heart and you know go and have a cardiologist did some tests and stuff and thankfully it seems like everything seems to be okay for now but there's no guarantee with that is there it doesn't mean anything in one sense because

I could still have a heart attack it doesn't mean I've got two more years before I turn 52 so you know that's two more could happen any time isn't it I'm talking about myself but I'm pretty sure it could happen to all of us anything can happen at any time Jesus can come back but we can be called away as well can't we and if our time is today if our time is tonight then the question is will we be ready to face the son of man will we be found standing when he comes that is a very important question isn't it we may think we've got time to work that out maybe but you going to bank your life on that so I think the passage even though there are a lot of details that may be confusing the main point of the passage really isn't is it Jesus is teaching us not to try and pinpoint the timing of his coming or of our going but to recognize that it can happen at any time and because it can we're to live in readiness for it all the time by marking his words by being careful and watchful and by praying that we will stand when he comes so let's do that right now and ask the Lord to help us to stand when he comes Father teach us not to be weighed down by wild living and the anxieties of life but to be watchful and careful make us your faithful witnesses in times of persecution and suffering giving us the courage to stand firm help us to put our faith wholly in your son Jesus so that when he comes we will be found to be standing by faith and waiting in obedience for him in Jesus name we pray amen