

Apocalypse Now

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 01] Heavenly Father, as we turn to these words of Jesus now, we ask that you would open our eyes that we might see through them, that you would open our ears that we might hear your voice, and that you would open our hearts so that the seed of your word would take deep root and bear fruit for eternal life.

And we ask this in your name. Amen. Well now, if you do not have a seat, just hover around the edges and a man under the age of 40 will stand and give you a seat.

When I was in high school, if it was reported that you didn't stand and give a woman a seat on the bus, you would be disciplined. And it stood me in great stead, I'll tell you.

I stand for everyone now. Now let's open our Bibles, shall we, to this very, very big passage in Luke 21.

If you can't have a Bible, share with your neighbour, please. Luke 21 on page 80 and 81. I'm looking forward after the service to our little gathering with our legal counsel to explain something of how the court cases ended up and then praying together with you all.

[1 : 33] And after the service finishes, Jim and I are not going to go to the back and shake hands. We're just going to go and remove our robes and then we'll take a couple of minutes to reorganise the furniture at the front.

People can pick up their younger children and then we'll begin at 11.30, which means I need to get on with the sermon. Now, Luke 21, this is a very, very big chapter.

This is what's called the apocalypse in Luke. And it's a suitable and appropriate chapter for us because we live in an apocalyptic age.

Everywhere we turn and everywhere I read, it speaks about cataclysmic climate change, about terrorism, about worldwide economic upheaval.

It speaks about wars and nuclear missiles and gloomy future predictions. And have you noticed that a fair few of the films Hollywood have produced in the last ten years and a fair few of the best-selling books have been apocalyptic doomsday books and movies.

[2 : 36] And I know a lot of it's entertainment, but there is a mood of fear, even despair and paralysis. And what Jesus does for us in these 30 or so verses is he gives us a history of history, a brief history of the world between his resurrection and his coming again.

And actually, there's only very tiny parts of it that are apocalyptic because his purpose is terribly practical. He's not trying to give us a schedule so that you'll be able to predict the day and date that Jesus comes.

In fact, he deliberately tries to stop that silly calculating business. The most important thing to know about Luke 21 is that it comes between Luke 20 and Luke 22.

I know that sounds like it comes from the department of the extremely obvious. It's very important. Last week in chapter 20, it was all about the resurrection of Jesus.

You remember? The Jewish authorities wanted to put Jesus in his place, which meant in a hole in the ground. But God raised him to the rightful place, to the throne of the world, to his right hand above every power and every person.

[3 : 59] The resurrection was the focus of chapter 20. And if you look at chapter 22, we instantly go into the hour of darkness where Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tortured and killed.

So between the resurrection and the death of Jesus is Luke 21. And what Jesus does is he spells out the implications of his death and resurrection for our lives in this world.

You see, what does it mean that the Son of God has been killed and that the Son of Man has been raised? What does it mean for history? What does it mean to say that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and rules everything?

How do I read the Vancouver Sun with that knowledge? And Jesus wants us to know this very big picture. So I've got three points from the passage.

The first is, where is history going? The second, what is the shape of history? And the third, how does that impact us? They're only small topics.

[5 : 09] And we're going to cover all three in the next 25 minutes. So firstly then, where is history going? Well now, of course, Jesus teaches, as the Bible teaches, that history has a beginning and an end.

That we're not caught up in a meaningless cycle. That the heavens and the earth were made by God and that God will bring them to an end with a new heavens and a new earth. But in this passage, Jesus speaks about two endings.

One short term, one long term. One local, one universal. One which is a catastrophic event for the temple and for the city.

The other is a catastrophic event for all creation. So let's just look at these two endings very quickly. The first ending is the ending of the temple in Jerusalem.

If you look down at verse 5, the passage opens with people admiring the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. And it was a complete wonder. It was built on the mountain where Abraham was to have sacrificed Isaac.

[6 : 18] Twice the size of Solomon's temple. It dominated the skyline of Jerusalem and it was covered with gold. But it was more than a magnificent building.

It was the symbol of the fact that God had promised to dwell with his people on earth. And in verse 6, Jesus says, It's going to be obliterated.

There's going to come a time when not one stone will stand on another. And his hearers are appalled and devastated. They feel, you might as well say that God is going to be obliterated. How can you possibly say that? When is it going to happen? What are going to be the signs? And in verses 20 to 24, Jesus gives them a specific and concrete answer to the destruction of the temple, which took place in 70 AD.

Let me read verse 20. When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you know that its desolation has come near. And if you look at verse 21 and 22, he gives advice on what to do.

[7 : 25] He says, run. And in 70 AD, the Roman general Titus brought four divisions of Roman soldiers and they surrounded Jerusalem at the time of Passover.

and he allowed an extra half million pilgrims into the city so that the city was bloated. And then he began a siege. And the siege went for months, cut off water, cut off food, and at the end of the siege, the Roman legions slaughtered every living thing in the city.

They burnt the temple to the ground. And in the desperate attempt to claw some of the gold from between the rocks, the Roman soldiers pulled the temple so that not one stone was left upon another.

And when the early Christians, who were still in Jerusalem, saw the city surrounded by the Roman legions, they remembered Jesus' words. And together they fled to a city called Pella across the Jordan and were saved.

But here is the Son of God on the steps of the temple. He's come to replace the temple. Speaking about the destruction of the temple.

[8 : 47] And the leaders of Israel find this intolerable. They would rather have their building. And so they have to kill Jesus. But Jesus says in the passage, that is not the end of all things.

That's not the true end. There is another end that is coming. And we look down to verse 25. There will be signs in sun and moon and stars and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity, the roaring of the seas and the waves.

Men fainting with fear and with foreboding at what is coming on the world. For the power of the heavens will be shaken. All those phrases come from the Old Testament. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

And when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near. The catastrophic destruction of the temple was one kind of event.

This is of an entirely different order. This is the coming of the Son of Man in judgment. The Son of Man, the Old Testament figure to whom God has given judgment over. And Jesus says on that day, as he calls it in verse 34, that great day, the heavens and the earth will pass away.

[10:02] And each of us will stand before the Son of Man in judgment. And he says that day will come suddenly and it will come unexpectedly and it will come universally.

And here is the point. The coming of the Son of Man is a direct result of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And I want to show you how in Jesus' words.

What is so remarkable about this chapter and these words of Jesus about that day is that he does not speak about judgment.

He speaks with pictures of longing and joy and happiness at the end of history. Four times in these verses, Jesus uses this little phrase, drawing near.

The first one I've already read in verse 20 about the destruction of the temple. When the armies appear, you know the desolation is drawing near. But the other three times he speaks about drawing near are the day of the Son of Man coming and each time, Jesus gives a picture of beauty and delight and paradise.

[11:13] Let's look at them. Verse 28. When these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near. We know this word.

This is why Jesus came, to visit and redeem his people. This is what God did as a picture in the Old Testament, liberating his people from slavery, from everything that kept them in bondage.

This has been where the Bible has been going from the beginning, to free us from all those things that we have given ourselves to so that we will see God face to face, utterly forgiven, utterly free and that's what the Son of Man is coming.

He comes bringing redemption in his hands. The second picture is in verse 30 and this is so important that Jesus tells a little parable to explain it.

This is the last parable in Luke's Gospel. Let me read it here. Verse 29. 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.

[12:27] When winter hits, the fig tree loses all its leaves. When the spring comes, it starts to bud. But when the leaves come out, you know that summer is already near.

Ever since we were evicted from the Garden of Eden, ever since we were evicted from that paradise, the world has been in the grip of a deepest and darkest winter where our hearts have become cold and hard towards God, which is why C.S. Lewis betrays the grip of Satan as the winter of the white witch.

It's the opposite of joy. It's the opposite of life. But when Jesus rose from the dead, the spring began and the first flower bud.

And when we look at the shape of history, which we will in a minute, and the fulfilment of Jesus' words, Jesus says, not only is redemption drawing near, but summer is coming.

I don't know if you've thought about what a great picture that is. I love the summer. Something weird happens in my neighbourhood in summer. People who've been hiding from each other all winter suddenly come out on the street and talk to each other.

[13:42] We eat together and we come together and we feel the warmth of the sun on our skin and we feel the warmth of each other's friendship and we try and buy as much Okanagan summer fruit as we possibly can and we sleep outdoors and you can smell the trees and the ocean and there's something about summer where we come to ourselves.

And this is the picture of the coming of the Son of Man. It's redemption. It's an eternal summer. And the third time he says coming near is in the next verse 31.

He says, so also you see these things. You know that the kingdom of God is near. The kingdom of God, as we know from Luke's Gospel, is the King, Jesus, overturning all our enemies.

all our enemies. All our division, all our decay, all our death, all our sickness, all our ostracism, all our disobedience, it's all placed under the feet of Jesus.

So what that eternal summer of redemption that's coming with the Son of Man means is that there's no tears, no mourning, no death, everything evil will be put away, the former things have been passed away and in that summer we will eat the fruit of the tree of life forever.

[14:54] It's a wonderful picture, isn't it? But how can Jesus make this promise? How can the coming of the Son of Man, which is the day of judgment, be the beginning of our redemption?

What is it that changes the great reckoning of the day of judgment into the day of joy and redemption? And the answer is this, it is the coming of the Son of Man.

Yes, Jesus has told us that the Son of Man sits at the right hand of the power of God. But he also says that it's the Son of Man who has come as the friend of sinners.

It's the Son of Man who came to seek and to save the lost. It's the Son of Man who has authority on earth to forgive sins. And repeatedly, he said to his disciples, the Son of Man is going up to Jerusalem, he'll be delivered into the hands of the authorities, he'll be killed and on the third day raised.

Where is history going? It is heading for that day when that Son of Man who is rejected for us and died for us is coming in great glory, bringing redemption for all his friends that day.

[16:06] The end of history is the direct consequence of the death and resurrection of Jesus. So when we talk about the end of history, the one who died is the one who is coming to draw all into his kingdom who have acknowledged him as king and live for him as king.

That's where history is going. Secondly, what is the shape of history? Well, the death and resurrection of Jesus do not just put the boundary line at the end of history.

Jesus teaches us in this passage that they actually explain the inner dynamic of the working of history, not just for believers but for the whole world.

He gives three illustrations. He says, take the destruction of the temple on one hand. In verse 22, he says, you know why it happens? It happens to fulfil all that's written.

In verse 24, when it happens, the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled. In that terrible event of the destruction of Jerusalem, that terrible historical event, it did not mean the end of God's purposes of blessing.

[17:14] It didn't mean that God had gone to sleep at the switch. What it meant was the exact fulfilment of the words that Jesus had said even in the last chapter.

Remember he said that the leaders of Israel who kill the son of the owner, the owner of the vineyard will give the vineyard to others.

Their hatred and their hostility and their rejection of Jesus does not mean the end of salvation but it means the treasure of God's promise and blessing now flows outside the walls of Jerusalem because the death and resurrection of Jesus shape what happened in that event.

or take the passage on persecution in verses 12 to 19. Let me read you some of these verses. If you'd look down verse 12. Before all this they will lay hands on you and persecute you delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons.

You'll be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Verse 16.

[18:21] You'll be delivered up even by parents, brothers, kinsmen, relatives and friends. Some of you they will put to death. You'll 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. See, throughout the gospel we know, don't we, there's one part of Jesus' teaching that the disciples just will not accept and that is that he is going to suffer. Every time Jesus spoke about his suffering the disciples say, don't talk to us about something else. And now that he speaks about our suffering I think our reaction is a little bit the same and it's very understandable, isn't it?

I mean, deep down we feel like we should not really have to suffer. I mean, we deserve good treatment. Things should not be so difficult following Jesus.

I mean, if God is all good and all powerful and really loves us life shouldn't be so difficult, should it? Well, Jesus says here in black and white that the Christian church is going to face deep and difficult ongoing persecution between the time of the resurrection and his return.

[19:35] That the normal position of the Christian church is to be out of favour. I know that's a great shock to our West Coast expectations of life and I think it's easy to miss this because in North America over the last 200 years the church has lived in relative peace and it's easy to begin to think that that's normal but Jesus is saying it is abnormal and the persecution Jesus describes here is not because we're behaving horribly and need to pull our socks up.

It's because of the name of Jesus. It's because we believe what Jesus says and seek to be like him. And the suffering is very bitter it's very nasty. Hated for the sake of Jesus imprisoned betrayed by members of one's own family delivered over by those whom we love.

It's nothing other than the death of Jesus at work in our lives shaping us and shaping the attitudes of those around us. But the resurrection of Jesus is also at work because it is when the church is

under great pressure Jesus says that is a time of testimony.

It's when the church is being squeezed that you find the church being more and more vital and the witness to the gospel going out. This is exactly what happened in the book of Acts.

This is exactly what is happening for our brothers and sisters in the global south. Where in the world is the church growing and most alive and vital? It seems to be in those places where it is most under pressure.

[21 : 16] In fact I'd go so far as to say that when the church finds cultural favour and is welcomed into public life it becomes increasingly weak and compromised and ineffective in its testimony.

The real church says Jesus will always be under pressure. To follow Jesus means to follow his example and to take up his cross. But look right there in the middle of it Jesus says I will be with you I'll give you the words to speak even in the midst of difficulty.

And even though they put you to death not a hair of your head will perish. It's a resurrection word. As the world tries to marginalize and even stamp out the church they're amazed by the endurance of the church because the church trusts a risen Christ because our hopes are invested in the eternal summer of redemption that's coming and therefore they can take our lives but they cannot separate us from God.

His suffering is not off God's radar it's not a slip up in the control room it is through suffering that the testimony of the church goes forward and because Christ remains on the throne none of us will perish ultimately.

but it's not just in our lives as believers where the death and resurrection shapes history it's also in the headlines in the newspapers in the political economic social events that we read about.

[22 : 45] Look down at verse 10 nation will rise against nation kingdom against kingdom there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and pestilences and there will be terrors and great signs in heaven but he says that is not the end.

When we look around and we see the worsening political economic and social situation the temptation to say the end is near and I think evangelical Christians have been at the forefront of this silliness.

There's a lot of money to be made in frightening people with predictions. I'm cleverer than anybody else I've got the inside track to reading the signs. Here's the thing the signs are not the signs of the end the signs are the signs that Jesus is Lord that he is on the throne.

They are signs that between the resurrection and return of Jesus there will always be upheaval and catastrophe and wars and famine and inequality and evil but it's through these things that redemption comes.

It's not as though when you become a Christian God puts a little ring of cotton wool around you and he works just inside the ring but not outside in the world. It is in the roaring of the seas it is in the distress of nations in perplexity that God is moving his redemption forward.

[24 : 06] None of it takes God by surprise it is God shaping history through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I wish I could spend more time on this but I can't.

We've looked at the end of history and we've looked at the shape of history and I finally want to look at how should this impact us now. Finally Jesus makes two applications one to our ears and how we hear and one to our eyes in how we see.

For our hearing he says do not be led astray. Verse 8 Take heed that you are not led astray for many will come in my name saying I am he.

Time is at hand. Do not go after them. From the beginning of the church there have been a huge crowd of people who are willing to stand up and say I am he.

And I am he in the original it's just I am. It's the name of God. There are people who stand and claim to be speaking for God divine truth bringing a fresh truth for the church.

[25 : 19] There are always people who claim to be true prophets bringing a new message a new revelation and Jesus says don't be gullible don't go after them don't be led astray.

And how do we test them? Verse 33 heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away. Jesus' words come from God because he is the son of God.

His words will never be obsolete. They will never be outdated. They stand the test of time. And even in this very chapter he's given us a little illustration where he predicted the fall of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD and it happened as he said.

You can tell the deceiver Jesus says because they point away from my words. They will speak with great originality out of their experience and they'll bring some fresh truth don't be taken away don't be led astray.

You can tell the true preacher because they say I've got nothing of my own to tell you I have to open the word of God and point to Jesus' words. And so the application to us is very simply are you listening to Jesus' words?

[26 : 29] Are you clinging to his words? Are you putting yourself in a place where you can drink in the words of life and hope? His eternal words don't be led astray. Secondly and finally sight do not despair.

Verse 34 take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation which means hangover and drunkenness and cares of this life that day come upon you suddenly like a snare it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth but watch at all times praying you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.

Jesus is saying there's two ways to look at the world. One way is to say Christ is on the throne I'm going to look at the world I'm going to look through the historical events to see what Christ's doing and the other way is to look at the world as though Christ is not on the throne.

I read a very interesting article this week from a scientist who sheepishly confessed he wished that he could believe in intelligent design. He says in my field of science they have removed mystery and replaced it with logic DNA and facts and he says there is just there's no reverence anymore and he wants there to be a God so that there's meaning in his science.

I found that very interesting and I think one of the temptations for us as believers is just to read the surface of the news to kind of wear two hats to read the news as though the death and resurrection of Jesus didn't really happen or that it doesn't have any bearing on what's happening now and when you look at persecution and you look at terrorism and you look at the calamities without the eyes of faith the temptation is to become overwhelmed and overcome and to give into despair and Jesus says don't let your hearts be weighed down like that.

[28 : 43] I don't think he's speaking about literal drunkenness and being hung over. It's a spiritual attitude of having a heavy heart, a heart that can't think clearly, a heart that doesn't see clearly, a heart that's weighed so far down that it focuses just on the little patch of carpet underneath you that takes shelter in our addictions because we're frightened and we despair of redemption.

Or he says you'll be weighed down by the cares of this life. That's the phrase he used in chapter 8 to speak about pleasure and money and clothing, filling our eyes with the vision of what Oak Ridge offers.

us. And when we're weighed down into despair, when we do not look at our lives and the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus, when we look at the tumults and persecution as though the world is out of control, it is as though we've got the telescope the wrong way around. And Jesus says watch, watch, watch. He says open your eyes more widely. He says lift up your heads because it is in these very things that my death and resurrection are at work.

Through these very things I am on the throne and it is through these very things that the eternal summer of our redemption is drawing near. So let us kneel and pray.

[30 : 12] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away.

Lord Jesus Christ we pray that you would continue to open our eyes and open our ears so that when we see these things take place we might look up and raise our heads and know that our redemption is drawing near and we ask this in Christ's name.

Amen. Prayers will continue. There will be a short period of silence between spoken prayers when you may add your own intercessions in the quietness of your own hearts.

From Psalm 105 in the prayer book. O give thanks unto the Lord and call upon his name. Tell the peoples what things he has done.

O let your songs be of him and praise him and let your talking be of all his wondrous works. Rejoice in his holy name.

[31 : 38] Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength. Seek his face ever more. Heavenly Father, how blessed we are to have you as our loving and all-powerful God.

You have sent your only son, Jesus, to die for us and redeem us from bondage and from sin. A son who will return again in glory to gather us to himself.

God will and as David preached this morning, we need not despair or fear what this world threatens because we have a resurrected Lord who gives us hope both now and eternally.

By your Holy Spirit, give us your vision and your courage to stand for you in this world, to meet the challenges of our individual circumstances and those we face as a community.

Father, we thank you for seeing us through the court case. Thank you for the diligence, dedication, and brilliance of our legal team, especially Stanley Martin and Jeff Cowper.

[33 : 14] We thank you for Cheryl Chang's clear and faithful recording of each day's evidence and arguments in court. We thank you for each one who bravely stood as witnesses on our behalf.

We thank you for those who went to court and prayed, and those who prayed at church or at home, and those who from afar interceded for us during the three weeks of the trial.

We thank you, Father, for all those who have given so generously to the legal fund, and pray now for the last remaining money to come in.

Father, we pray most earnestly for Judge Stephen Kelleher, that you might give him your insight and wisdom, as he reads all the affidavits and the evidence and arguments presented in court.

We pray boldly that he might rule in our favor. In the meantime, we ask, Father, that we and the other parishes may wait patiently and with absolute confidence in your sovereignty and for your good and perfect will to be done.

[34 : 34] Lord, we think about the world in which we live.

We pray for the Middle East and especially Iran. we ask, Father, that you might bring your wisdom into this situation. Raise up righteous leadership who seeks to truly serve the people.

We pray for our Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan. Give them your safety and protection each day. In Canada, we pray especially for Native communities hit by influenza and ask for your healing hand on the persons affected.

Dear Jesus, we remember those faithful ones who labor in the gospel both here and overseas. we remember Catherine Gwinnett from the North American Indigenous Ministries in Campbell River, Sharon Thompson with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Burkina Faso, Brian McConachie with Ratanak Foundation in Cambodia, and Doug and Anna-Marie Graham serving in Asia.

Protect them, support them, and give them grace to bear faithful witness to you. Heavenly Father, we lift up to you the inaugural meeting of the new Anglican province in North America Texas this coming week.

[36 : 57] We pray that your Holy Spirit would be very present in all the deliberations, teaching, and worship. We pray for safety and protection for David as he travels to be part of this gathering, and for strength and wisdom as he teaches during this conference.

Lord, today on Father's Day, we remember our earthly fathers.

fathers, we thank you for them, those who are here with us, and those who have passed on. Father, we know that it is only through your grace that we have the strength to be who you intend us to be.

Today, we pray for all fathers and those with fatherly hearts, that they would look to you for guidance and wisdom, and that you would bless them richly, enabling them to love well those given into their care and nurture.

Our dear Savior, we bring to you those of our church family who have been ill and are in need of your healing touch. We remember George, Ron, Harold, Paul, Ben, Velva, Rowena, Liz, and Christopher.

[39 : 00] We also remember Keith and Emily Ganser as they grieved Keith's grandfather, Roa Jones, who died this past Friday.

We thank you for your loving kindness to each one, and pray that you would come to them in your mercy to heal mind and body to your praise and glory. And, Father, we pray for those of us here today who may feel far from you, and any who may be feeling depressed, anxious, weary, or who are in pain, or who are lonely or discouraged.

Bring before God any, including yourselves, in particular need at this time. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. All these prayers we pray in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.