

Luke 21

Quite the cheery teaching from our Lord today, no?

I mean, we are in the modern west, we don't have to worry about false teaching, wars, and pestilences? Or people being rounded up for preaching the Gospel? No one hates us or calls us hateful for what we proclaim and believe, right? We didn't just have a blood moon eclipse and certainly there's no nations rising up against other nations that we would have to worry about? This is modern society, we are so smart, we have it all figured out.

Well, maybe this reading is worth taking a look at, after all.

I can't help, as a Pastor, but be drawn to verse 14, "Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom..." Now if that's not my kind of sermon prep advice I don't know what is!

Or perhaps that's not the correct application of that verse. Perhaps these verses carried with them some advice for the disciples of Jesus and the trials they would be facing. And if so, well, which verses apply to them, which to us?

Let's see what we can find out.

We can't forget what starts the reading, the people admiring the temple. And let me tell you, having seen the foundation of the platform built around it, it was a

masterpiece. Blocks bigger than that altar lifted, placed, and fitted so tight you couldn't put a sheet of paper between them. Amazing marvels even for modern standards. But Jesus would have them think of a greater temple, not that one in Jerusalem, but the one it was a copy of – the eternal throne room of God. And to show the frailty of that earthly temple, yes frailty of 10 ton blocks, he tells them that one day those stones stacked so high, well, they won't all be.

This comes true in 70ad. Rome gave a fair bit of leniency to the Jewish people due to their strict adherence to the Old Covenant laws. This is why, for example, the thieves and Jesus are killed and brought down off their crosses before sundown.

Anywhere else in the Roman empire they would have been content to leave you for weeks suffering and rotting. But those pesky Israelites would rather die than betray their Old Testament laws so Rome said "Ok, fine, just don't riot and you can have a few things your way." But then the Israelites, in 70ad, decided to riot anyway and rebel against Rome. So Rome decided they didn't care how many of them they had to kill, they would crush their desire for independence.

So Rome surrounds Jerusalem with an army, and attacks. Fires start, and stones, that were so magnificent and immovable... come tumbling down, and bodies literally pile up in the streets. And I mean that, Josephus a Jewish historian writes that the "legionnaires had to clamber over the bodies to continue their extermination." That is what Jesus is referring to in verses 20-24 when he says on

that day you will flee to the hills, and the great distress that will be against this people, with swords and being taken captive.

So this is our indication that everything before this in our reading, before verse 25, probably is in reference to events prior to 70ad. Which sadly means I have to do sermon prep afterall. Further evidence of this is found in verse 9. Before this he talks of false teachers, wars, and rumors of war and we think “Oh man it’s so bad, it’s horrible, this must be the end!” But notice what he said, “These things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.” And then he goes on to describe the blessing of wisdom and strength and protection he will give to his people in that age – “not a hair on your head will perish.”

And what do we make of that when 11 of the 12 disciples are killed for proclaiming Jesus. “Some protection, Jesus!” Well either that means 1. This protection was for a specific time and trial, which undoubtedly God saw his apostles through according to his will. Or 2. As we hear of the Saints in heaven rejoicing before the throne, well, let’s just say, I don’t think they are complaining any longer about suffering, pain, fear, or the state of the hairs on their head, no? My hunch is: it’s probably a bit of both.

God will guide his people through the most horrific of times, until he sees them safely to his Kingdom where nothing will hurt them again.

And perhaps that is a good transition to our last verses. They end around about verse 27 with the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. We know when this is, right? This is the Last Day, for sure. So what does Jesus say about that? Sun and moon and stars stuff. Fearful and fainting people. And here we had a blood moon last week, and people are terrified all over the world. Which tells me... are the conditions met? I think so, and I think they were pretty much met soon after 70ad and the end of the apostolic age.

Yes the Gospel must go to all nations, but folks, which nation is it not in? And I guarantee you it was there far before we think. History reveals more and more how the ancient people traveled and shared news, and certainly news is shared of a Risen Savior, right away after Pentecost. And even now, there are more Christians in Africa than North America, there are more Christians in Asia than North America.

And so then we want to rush to newspapers and add up numbers and find dates, but let's harken back to Paul's teaching on the last day in 1 Thessalonians: it will come like a thief in the night. He is waiting, so that more may be saved, and so we wait, which isn't always fun, but we wait and work in the days he gives us, good or bad. And those days aren't for us to decide, only to stand fast in, and be faithful and honestly here in modern America, well, lets just say, we haven't got our hands

cut off yet, nor our heads, nor been put into a coliseum. Let's be brave, let's find perspective.

Because, I think this is the point of this reading now, and our encouragement, is that even in the horrible days, which God's people have gone through before – did he see them through it? Yes he did. And so will he see us through the days he has given us? Yes he will.

In fact looks at that last verse: “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” And I dare say that means for you, Christian, the worse it gets out there, the taller you should stand. The bolder you should be. The more hopeful you should become.

And we think, “no, Jesus that's crazy.” These are horrible things, wars, running for the hills. But keep in mind he never says they aren't horrible, in fact, he says they are – “woe to them in those bad days.” The Gospel isn't “buck up, it's not so bad.”

The Gospel is that Jesus knows what horrible days are like. He's had them.

Betrayal, darkness, torture, lies, mockery, shame, injustice, death. Which is he unfamiliar with? Which has he not overcome? So Christian in these days, rejoice in the good, lament the bad, but stand tall and rejoice. Because your God has won for you redemption and a spot at his victory feast on the last day. Whenever it comes.

Don't worry about that, in fact, we don't have to worry so much at all. He will see you there. God be praised.