

“GREAT TRIBULATION” AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

LUKE 21:5-38

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Introduction

In evangelical churches, I hear such questions as these being pondered: “Are we living in the end times?” “I believe from looking around me, reading the paper, and watching the news that we must be near the end.”

Yes, yes, yes we are indeed in the ends times and nearing THE END! The Bible tells us that with the coming of Christ the end *has come*- -but this must be understood properly. The time period between the First and Second Comings of Jesus is described as the end, the last days and the last hour in Scripture (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; cf. 1 John 2:18ff).

But when specifically will the end (THE END) come? What will be the signs of the times that the end (THE END) is near? That is, when will God’s Kingdom be fully revealed in power and the Son of Man come to rule and reign in all of His glory (that END)? Or perhaps more precisely: ***When will the END of the END come?***

Many in Israel during Jesus’ time expected the end to come immediately when Messiah came. Jesus has taught and teaches more in our passage this morning that the end has come, but will continue to progressively come between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ.

As believers, our confidence is that in Christ we are truly more than overcomers through Jesus who loved us (Romans 8:31-39). We can endure and persevere in spite of the persecutions, temptations and great tribulation. When will the end come? ***The end will come progressively until the Son of Man returns. That is, the end will continue to unfold progressively until THE END.***

Even though it is the end, the history of sinful mankind will continue to unfold as if there was not a cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ; but the full redemption of God’s people will reveal itself when Jesus returns for His own at THE END. Today’s passage has been popularly known as *The Olivet Discourse* (also found in Matthew 24 and Mark 13).

Oceans of scholarly ink have been spilled on interpreting *The Olivet Discourse* in the history of the Church. Like interpreting the Book of Revelation, it is important to focus on the clear aspects of the passage, and compare scripture with scripture with regard to that which may be a bit more unclear. One more important note: While I try to point out

specifically in each sermon references to the Old Covenant Scriptures, in this sermon that would be quite difficult due to the numerous references and allusions.

Suffice it to say that what is undergirding all of my interpretation in this sermon is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is acting as the Great and Final Prophet from God. As part of a long line of prophetic utterances, Jesus is giving finality to the messages already spoken. Jesus uses Old Testament imagery in abundance and he alludes to many passages from the prophets. It would be beyond the purview of one sermon to attempt to enumerate every single Old Covenant reference from our passage this morning.

And at the end of the day, I should point out; very few are really satisfied with the interpretation of this passage no matter how detailed the exegesis, because if the truth be truly known, we want to know a date for these things! "Give me a specific date!" our sinful hearts and inquiring minds say! So, if you interpret this passage without attempting to set a date, to many, you have failed to interpret it (although I would say you have merely failed to tickle their ears).

While we try to interpret this passage by focusing on the signs and wonders of the End Times, and speculate in faulty and frivolous date setting, we have missed Jesus' focus for us!

Jesus' focus for us in this passage is simply this in summary: God's sovereign decree in history is being worked out for God's glory and our good ("...*For these things **must** first take place...*" - v. 9); Do not be led astray by false Christs and teachers (v. 8); When you hear of wars and chaos in every place, do not think that the end has come yet (vv. 10-11); Get ready for some rough times of tribulation for professing Christ (vv. 12-18); Know that nothing will happen to you apart from the sovereign decree of God whether you perish or live (vv. 18-19); watch for the Son of Man's return (vv. 34-36) and be prepared by His grace to meet him when he comes! *This is the summary focus of this passage for God's people!*

Two Questions...

In Matthew's Gospel we are taught that Jesus teaches about the end and his glorious return in response to two questions:

^{ESV} Matthew 24:1-3: Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"

^{ESV} Luke 21:7 And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

What is the real question being asked here? The disciples desire to know when the temple will be destroyed. ***The insinuation and implication in the question is that when the***

temple will be destroyed the end will come- -life as they have known it as Israelites will be no more. So the question is not merely about *when the temple will be destroyed*, but also more specifically **when will the temple be destroyed and then the end come?**

As John Calvin wrote: "...As soon as Christ said that *the temple* would be destroyed, their [the disciples'] thoughts immediately turned to *the end of the world*....They [the disciples] associate the *coming of Christ* and *the end of the world* as things inseparable from each other; and by the *end of the world* they mean the restoration of all things, so that nothing may be wanting to complete the happiness of the godly" (*Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. XVII, pg. 117).

Professor Geldenhuys commented: "The disciples, when they asked this question, no doubt thought that the destruction of the temple would take place at the same time as His coming in glory (the full revelation of His Messianic power) and the end of the world, with the establishment of His Messianic Kingdom (cf. Matthew 24:3)" (*Luke*, NICNT, pg. 525).

As Professor Green asks the question here: "Does Jesus speak of the destruction of the temple or of the End? In fact, Jesus speaks of both, but not in a way that marks the fall of the temple as the onset of the consummation of God's purpose in history. Jesus does interpret the fall of Jerusalem as an eschatological event, but not in immediate relation to the coming of the eschaton" (NICNT, pg. 731).

Jesus answers the questions put to him concerning the end by using what is called in theological interpretation as ***prophetic foreshortening***. **Prophetic Foreshortening** simply means that events that might be removed from one another in the distant future are spoken as if they were very close together (cf. A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pg. 148). An illustration of *prophetic foreshortening* is when we look at mountain peaks from a distance they appear to be near one another—but in reality they are many miles far removed from each other.

ESV Luke 21:9 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."

We should begin interpreting our passage from Dr. Luke's Gospel this morning by keeping this prophetic foreshortening in mind. Jesus is proclaiming events in the distant future (the coming return of the Son of Man) in close connection with events in the near future (destruction of temple and Jerusalem for example).

Professor Bock says it this way: "All of these events—even the temple's fall—are part of God's movement to consummation. They are part of God's plan, since one event guarantees the other....What happens in Jerusalem as A.D. 70 approaches will be like the real end, which brings the return. In these descriptions Jesus answers the disciples' short-term question about the temple, but he also sets up a long-term discussion about the end. The two events mirror each other in terror" (Vol. II, pg. 1666, 68).

This is why Jesus can say that in verse 32: *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.”* What does he mean? Jesus is teaching that the near future events that will occur in that that present generation (destruction of Jerusalem and the temple) is closely tied as one phase of the whole end times (as one part of a play in the second act).

What happens in history in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (near future events) within that generation, is an intrusion and partial fulfillment of Christ’s glorious Second Coming in salvation and judgment (some will flee and be saved by Christ, some will suffer death and destruction of judgment along with Jerusalem).

You might say that the near events that Jesus is speaking of are pictures or types of the end of the world, so that in this sense the judgment of God has come upon mankind intruding into history in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. While I agree with some Reformed interpreters that many of the signs (cosmic, wars, famines, catastrophes) that Jesus mentions were manifested during that generation who experienced the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the temple (our Preterist friends), *I do not agree that these signs are to be wholly restricted to this time period.*

I think that Jesus says that what will happen in that generation (near future events) will be characteristic of the entire Church Age from the ascension of Jesus Christ to this Second return.

Although there are signs that will take place within that generation that Jesus is addressing in Dr. Luke’s Gospel, these are also the signs that will continue to be manifested until Jesus returns- -perhaps even with a heightening of those signs right before the end - -but the events remain connected when we use prophetic foreshortening as has been explained.

Professor Geldenhuys wrote: “So terrible, the Savior warns them [his disciples], will be the judgments soon to burst forth over the people of Jerusalem who so persistently rejected Him that the events accompanying those judgments upon the guilty city will be the foreshadowing of the Final Judgment at His second advent. For this reason, Jesus’ prophecies in connection with the events of the End-time are so closely linked up with those concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple that it is extremely difficult in studying this prophetic discourse” (*Luke*, NICNT, pg. 523).

Bock agrees with this interpretation saying: “...Jesus is saying that this group of disciples will experience the catastrophe of A.D. 70 within their lifetime, an event that itself pictures the beginning of end-time events. As such, experiencing the fall in A.D. 70 is as good as experiencing the end, because one event pictures, guarantees, and reflects the other” (Vol. II, pg. 1691).

Also, important to note is the way Jesus describes events associated with the Second Coming in terms of the people of Israel and of life in Judea (Hoekema, pg. 149).

Herman Ridderbos commented wisely on this: "...The prophet [of the Old Covenant era] paints the future in the colors and with the lines that he borrows from the world known to him, i.e., from his own environment.... We see the prophets paint the future with the palette of their own experience and project the picture within their own geographical horizon. This appears in the Old Testament prophets in all kinds of ways. And in our opinion, ***this is also the explanation of Jesus' description of the future. He follows the Old Testament most closely, and not only is the temporal perspective lacking at the end, but the geographical horizon within which the eschatological events take place is restricted in some places to the country of Judea or to the cities of Israel***" (my emphasis added, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, Ridderbos, pg. 525).

All this is to say that we should not overly interpret this passage with rigid and strict literalness. For instance, Jesus' coming will not be merely in Jerusalem, but this is the geographical horizon that Jesus uses to communicate the truth of his future return.

The questions asked were: "When will these things be?" "What will be the signs that these things are about to happen?" Jesus answers these questions, but he is not interested in assisting date setters in their frivolous plight.

Rather, Jesus pastorally desires his disciples to understand God's faithfulness to them and how by His grace they can persevere. Jesus' emphasis is the *constant imminence* of the End of All Things. Jesus does not encourage his people to set dates of when he will return, just that we will learn in reliance upon God's grace to be prepared and watchful for his return- *-we must have a lasting faith for the last days!* And this is only possible in our daily reliance upon Jesus.

The destruction of the temple... (vv. 5-9)

The people look up and around at the glorious temple that is built and as they are looking in adoration at the glory of this temple, Jesus tells them of this temple's impermanence that will lead to inglorious and devastating destruction.

Jesus clearly tells of the future destruction of the temple (vv. 5-6). We should be reminded that many have been learning from Jesus in the temple. In Luke 19:46-48, Jesus has cleansed the temple and removed the sinful influence of greedy men. He has also replaced the sinfulness with the preaching and teaching of the gospel (20:1ff).

In the larger context of chapter 20, the teachers of Israel are seeking to lay hands on Jesus to destroy him (see also 22:1ff). They have sought to question him and undermine his authority and influence with the people - *-yet the people are still listening to him and asking him questions because of his obvious authority and wisdom from God.*

Here in Dr. Luke's Gospel, Jesus teaches them more about the destruction of the temple in which he is at that very moment preaching and teaching about the Kingdom. Again, as we learned in our previous sermons type (the temple) is giving way to anti-type or fulfillment (Jesus' body) right before the eyes of all who were there. Our passage ends

with another reference to the location of Jesus teaching in the temple- -and the people coming daily to hear Him teach (21:37-38).

John Calvin noted wisely: “The disciples undoubtedly perceived that Christ was paying, as it were, his last adieu to the temple. It remained, therefore, that he should erect a new *temple* far more magnificent, and that he should produce a more flourishing condition of the kingdom, as had been foretold by the prophets; fore he had nothing to do with that *temple*, in which every thing was opposed to him” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XVII, pg. 115).

Geldenhuis wrote: “Through His [Jesus’] personal advent to the people and to the temple, the Old Dispensation in which God had to be worshipped by outward ceremonies and sacrifices in the temple, had come to an end” (*Luke*, NICNT, pg. 524).

As Jesus taught clearly in John’s Gospel, the temple “that cannot be shaken” (cf. Heb. 12:27-29) is Jesus’ body:

ESV John 2:15-22: And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The temple was the religious, social and political center of the Jewish universe (Beale and Carson, pg. 374) and Jesus tells them that this place where God was accessed, sacrifices and prayers were made, would soon be obliterated (cf. 19:44ff).

The temple was one of the great wonders of the ancient world with stones the size of railroad boxcars, the sight of the temple was grand (cf. Hughes, pg. 296). The Second Temple was part of Herod the Great’s national reconstruction program (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 1.21.1; *Antiquities* 15.11). Herod built new foundation walls and enlarged the temple area to 400 yards by 500 yards, about twice its original size.

The refurbishing of this grand new temple was started in 19 B.C. and continued for over eighty years, not being completed until A.D. 63-64, just a few years before the city and the temple fell (Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1660). The significance of Jesus’ teaching, the shocking aspect of this could only be understood by us by thinking of the Twin Towers being destroyed, or perhaps imagining the destruction of our nation’s capitol. But even these things cannot get close to the shocking news that the Jews heard Jesus tell in this!

Before the destruction of the temple and the end that it signifies, there will be certain events that will cause great concern for God’s people.

The Bible teaches us that Satan knows that his time is short- -He even knows that with the end, the end is coming! (Rev. 12:12). So our enemy acts in a counterfeit effort to deceive the church and the world.

False prophets will come (v. 8). These false prophets would lead many astray (There will be date-setters why say *The time is at hand!* V. 8). Many will come in Jesus' Name claiming to be sent by him with a word from the Lord. As Jesus warned earlier in his ministry recorded in Matthew's Gospel:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ *You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?* ¹⁷ *So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.* ¹⁸ *A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.* ¹⁹ *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* ²⁰ *Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.* ²¹ ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*** ²² ***On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'*** ²³ ***And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'***

The Apostle Paul writes in the first century that the time will come when men will not endure sound teaching:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

^{ESV} 2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

^{ESV} 1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

“The end will not come at once...” (v. 9). Jesus teaches his disciples to have correct eschatological expectations according to God's timetable and not their own. In other words, it is indeed the end, but not yet the ending of the end.

We should be reminded that Jesus' teaching here is an “already-not yet”, eschatological kind of language. The end has begun, but will progressively come throughout the last days between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ. Again, prophetic foreshortening is helpful in understanding what Jesus is teaching here.

The end has intruded in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, but the sinful world will continue to live and die “normally” as it has throughout history- -but believers are to live

expectant eschatological lives as they look for the Christ to come gloriously and redeem them fully.

The world attempts to destroy itself and the Church... (vv. 10-19)

Jesus seems to be indicating that there will be an increase in signs toward the end before the glorious coming of the Son of Man, but this could also just be normal sinful history working itself out (wars, earthquakes, famines).

“Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom...” (v. 10; cf. Old Testament apocalyptic language: Isaiah 19:2; 2 Chronicles 15:6). Those things that characterize a world of sin and misery will continue during the time of Christ’s absence.

As historian Will Durant noted: “War is one of the constants of history, and has not diminished with civilization and democracy. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war” (Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pg. 81)

There will be great catastrophes! “There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences...” (v. 11a; cf. Old Testament apocalyptic language: Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 18:7; 68:8; Isaiah 24:19, 29:6, 64:1).

What characterizes a world of sin and misery will continue to historically happen as if the cross and resurrection of Christ has not taken place (it will seem to unbelievers and scoffers that everything is continuing “normally” as history unfold, cf. 2 Peter 3:3ff). People will be at war with one another, people will experience great catastrophes, and as much as people might be tempted to think that this means the end of the world, the end will not come yet (v. 9b).

We are not to be deceived (v. 8) by what we surmise as being “the end”. When we turn on the cable news channel and we see wars, catastrophes, the threat of a stock market crash, none of these are anything more than what happens historically in this present age full of sin and misery (cf. Luke 20:34ff; I’ve even heard secularists recently using the terms “the end” and “Armageddon” to describe our times).

This historical landscape is the one on which we have been located to witness to the grace of God found in Christ- -regardless of how difficult the times get.

How easily we are deceived into misinterpreting difficult circumstances! You know when we say that certain times in our lives are “unsure” this reveals a *presumptuous humanism* in our thinking. To say that times are unsure for instance because we perceive there is more war and bloodshed than ever before, or gas prices are sky high, or the stock market is plummeting only reveals that we are practical humanists who have drunk too deeply of the thinking of this present age.

If living “sure” is dependent upon us, our riches, our strength and success, then all times should be characterized as “unsure” regardless of how prosperous and peaceful we think we have it! Have we forgotten (especially as American Christians) our first love and our

true calling to suffer with Christ as sacrificial servants who boast in our weaknesses, so that God's power would be made perfect in us?!

All times are sure because our God is committed to loving and redeeming us in Christ! We must weather the storms around us, the circumstances that God decrees for our lives by keeping our eyes on and hope in Jesus.

As the Church identified with Jesus Christ, we must be prepared to live humbly and wisely as God enables us. The Church will be greatly persecuted because of the cause and message of Christ (vv. 13-19).

We see much of what Jesus teaches partially fulfilled in the Book of Acts, but we must understand that *what was experienced by the early church is what is experienced by each generation of faithful Christians* (cf. Acts 4:3; 5:18; 12:1; 18:12; 21:27; 24:1-2; 25:8; 26:1). Although much of this persecution is realized in Dr. Luke's sequel, the entire Church Age from Jesus' ascension to His return will be characterized by these things- - we too are part of Dr. Luke's sequel as the Gospel continues to expand and be preached to the "ends of the earth":

Persecution (v. 12a)- Fighting against Christ through His Church.

Kicked out of the synagogues (where they worshipped, v. 12b)- The public worship of God will be constantly threatened.

Imprisonment (v. 12b)- The Gospel will be silenced as we are unjustly treated for Christ's Name.

Trials before the kings of the nations of this world (v. 12c)

As theologian Cornelius Venema explains: "...Since Matthew 24 [and Luke 21] seems to describe signs of the times that are characteristic of the whole period leading up to the coming of Christ at the end of the age, it confirms the testimony of those general references already mentioned that speaks of tribulation as the experience of the believer in this present age. No believer should be surprised by the world's hostility or opposition. Christ himself predicted that this would be a sign of the end of the age" (*The Promise of the Future*, pg. 146).

"Great" Tribulation

We should understand that this tribulation, suffering and persecution that Jesus refers to is not merely something the Jews will experience, but is a reality that all Christians who make up His Church are called to experience as part of their sanctification-discipleship-suffering (see Hebrews 12:4ff). The Apostle John himself says that what characterized the life of Christians after the resurrection and ascension of Christ was tribulation:

ESV Revelation 1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

ESV John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Jesus characterizes the entire Church Age between the first and second comings as a time of great tribulation for one's faith in Jesus (cf. Matt. 5:10-13). Jesus never tells his people to expect a glorious of power and glory for the Church in this present age. As theologian Herman Bavinck wrote:

“In the present aeon [age] his disciples cannot expect anything other than oppression and persecution and must forsake all things for his sake. Jesus nowhere predicts a glorious future on earth before the end of the world. On the contrary, the things Jesus experienced are the things his church will experiences. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above the master” (*Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. IV: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation, pg. 673).

The tribulation and persecution that is revealed in the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (near future) is a foretaste of the great(er) tribulation to be experienced before the great Day of the Lord (distant future, cf. Matt. 24:21-22). Another way of saying this is that in this passage you have multiple prophetic fulfillments ending with a final and consummate fulfillment at the end of the present age:

ESV Matthew 24:21-22: For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Professor Cornelius Venema writes: “...the great tribulation that is likely to characterize history shortly before the close of the present age is but an intensified and culminating expression of that tribulation that marks the whole period between Christ's first and second comings. For this reason, it is even possible...to speak of a great tribulation that is an ongoing experience of the saints in this present age. However, as history draws to its close under the reign and rule of Christ, it appears that Satan's opposition to Christ will come to acute and final expression in a short season of more severe tribulation” (*The Promise of the Future*, pg. 156-57).

What we should understand from this is that the tribulation is neither restricted to the Jews or until the end of the time (*contra* Premillennial Dispensationalists), but the tribulation is characteristic of the entire Church Age, and all Christians (Jew and Gentile) will undergo this tribulation for the sake of Jesus Christ (although we must keep in mind that this tribulation will heighten and grow in intensity as we get closer to *the end of the end*).

While the disciples are still hoping that Christ's kingdom of bliss and restful peace with God will immediately come (cf. Acts 1:6-11) at this point in their understanding, Jesus points them not to an immediate kingdom manifestation but to a long period of suffering patiently, walking by faith in the power of God.

Our Premillennial Dispensationalist friends incorrectly give false hope to Christians that the Church will *not* experience the tribulation, but this is to misinterpret Scripture and

give false hopes that are against anything any faithful confession Christian has experienced throughout history.

Try telling Christians who are dying daily for their profession of faith throughout the world that they will not experience tribulation; try telling the early church that they didn't really experience tribulation for the Name of Christ! Only in comfortable American, air-conditioned evangelical churches could this notion of Dispensationalism ever have been invented (perhaps that is why it is only truly popular in America?!).

Because the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ, the end has dawned. The kingdoms of this world will seek to destroy the Kingdom of God in all its manifestations. Every local congregation who believes and faithfully lives for Jesus Christ is a threat to this entire world system that will oppose not only Christ but also His people (cf. Acts 9).

In the world's opposition to the Church, we find the antagonistic and hateful, yet pointless pursuit of dethroning the reigning and ruling king of kings and lord of lords that every human being will have to stand before and give an account (cf. Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Cor. 3:10ff).

The Church is to testify to and witness to the reality of the Kingdom of God found in Christ through witness and suffering (v. 13).

Some people ask me: "But pastor, I don't struggle with tribulation like others throughout the world. What is wrong?" Prayerfully use this time to be prepared. Imagine a time NOT when Christianity has a president who rules over the people and makes everyone obey God's law here in this world. Rather, imagine the possibility of serving Christ as a Christian when there is no political party or leader who you can support wholeheartedly - leaders who only want to stamp out the name of Christ and kill you.

Imagine the possibility of a time when you cannot come to worship freely and openly on the Lord's Day, but when worship could actually end in your death; when you might have to worship God in privacy and in caves for fear of what man would do you to - when Christianity is against the Law. Imagine the possibility of a time when baptism and the baptism of your children in the Triune Name could lead to imprisonment and the sword for your family rather than good wishes sent via Hallmark!

All of these things are possibilities in a fallen world according to Jesus, and I do not want you to be too comfortable with your circumstances here. This is true especially if what has occurred throughout the Church Age will get worse as we near the end of the end. Jesus gave his people these warnings to prepare them for this reality - and we should not discount this. If Jesus characterizes discipleship in this way, we should expect nothing less (it is our *job description* and we are to fix our expectations accordingly).

I do not want you to kid yourself into thinking that the Kingdom will be brought in with your political power and economic might - it is through the weakness of preaching, service, and denial of ourselves that we make the Kingdom known in a fallen world.

If -no, when!- - these times (ever) come in this way (in the way that others throughout the world have experienced tribulation) would you still be strong in your faith and love for Christ? Would you still seek to gather corporately together to worship, hear the preaching of the Word and partake in the sacraments—even if it meant death for you and your family? If the corporate gathering of Christ’s Church is not important to you now, what makes you think that under great persecution it will be for you?!

We do want to pray for our leaders that we might live at peace as Christians under them; we want to be involved as citizens of this world in bringing about change. But we must understand that our hope is not in this present age that is passing away. Our hope, our true citizenship is in heaven and we are exiles and strangers here (Heb. 11:13-16) who await an Eternal City whose designer and building is God!

In the midst of tribulation, there is God’s love and help to His people. No matter how difficult the times, we can be sure that the Spirit of God will give great wisdom to His people in times of trouble (v. 15)

ESV Acts 6:10 But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he [Stephen] was speaking.

One’s own family will betray Christians and have them martyred for their beliefs (v. 16)

Micah 7:5-6: Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms;¹⁶ for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

ESV Mark 13:12 And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.

There will be an ever-present hatred by all people because of Christ and His gospel (v. 17). Have you not seen this in your own life? Have you countered this hatred with love (Romans 12-13; 1 Cor. 13:4ff), or you have you become embittered and vengeful as the world?

ESV John 15:18-19: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

As God’s beloved people, in Christ, we are all safe as in a strong tower or fortress- -no matter how difficult the times become (vv. 18-19). As Jesus taught earlier in his ministry the hope of God’s love, so he reiterates this confident hope:

ESV Luke 12:4-9: "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.¹ Yes, I tell you, fear him!⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?¹ And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ Why, even the hairs of your head

are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows. ⁸ "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

In Christ, we are more than overcomers (cf. Romans 8:31-39) and nothing, absolutely nothing can harm our spiritual peace and union with Christ and His Spirit (vv. 18-19).

In fact, this is God's decreed will for *how* His people will inherit life- -just as Christ did- -through suffering (v. 19). The Apostle Paul's hope and our hope is to say with great faith and praise:

ESV Philippians 3:9-11: ...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith- ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Jerusalem is destroyed by the Gentiles... "The Horror!" (vv. 20-24)

Finally, let us put on our zoom lens and focus again on the end in the destruction of Jerusalem that manifests the end of the end. Jesus has already clearly taught that Jerusalem will be destroyed because of her rejection of Christ. The earthly city that "can be shaken" will be shaken, but the Eternal City, the Heavenly Jerusalem, or the "Jerusalem above" (Heb. 12:22; Gal. 4:21ff; Rev. 22) will not be touched by sinful human hands (v. 20). As Jesus has already predicted earlier in Dr. Luke's Gospel:

ESV Luke 19:43-44: For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Great distress for all (vv. 22-24).

It is significant to note that Jesus as the Great and Final Prophet of God is using language concerning the destruction of Jerusalem that was used when the Old Covenant people were destroyed by their enemies for covenant unfaithfulness. In 1 Kings 9 we read:

ESV 1 Kings 9:6-9: But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, ⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. ⁸ And this house will become a heap of ruins. ¹ Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?' ⁹ Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the LORD their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore the LORD has brought all this disaster on them.'" (see also Lev. 26:31-33; Deut. 28:49ff; Dan. 9:26; Mic. 3:12; Zech. 8:1-8; 11:6).

This prophecy from 1 Kings was partially fulfilled in the exile of the Jews from the land that occurred in the Old Covenant Epoch; however, this covenant curse was fully realized after the time of Jesus in 70 A.D. (cf. Deut. 28:25ff). Remember part of the specific curses that Moses told the Israelites was a destruction by their enemies; for covenant disobedience to God Israel would become “a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth”:

ESV Deuteronomy 28:25 "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

ESV Deuteronomy 28:37 And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away.

ESV Deuteronomy 28:45 "All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.

The destruction of Jerusalem is a historical warning to all nations who reject the Son of God. Jerusalem's destruction is a type or picture of the end when Jesus will judge the world and redeem his own.

According to Josephus (*The Jewish War*, vi:9) 1,000,000 Jews perished at that time with the destruction of Jerusalem (through famine, pestilences, fratricide, and the Roman sword) and 97,000 prisoners were taken and carried off elsewhere. Hundreds of thousands of people perished in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD under the Roman general Titus; even Jewish children were cooked for food, Josephus tells us.

The horror! The horror of rejecting Christ! Learn from this historical intrusion of God's wrath upon unbelief!

And yet, this is just a foretaste of God's wrath on unbelief. When Christ returns in all of His glory, His judgment upon the earth will be far greater (see Revelation 16-19). Dr. Luke specifically focuses upon the destruction of Jerusalem as a picture or type or preview of the greater judgment to come upon unbelief (in contrast to Matthew's detailed focus on more specifically Jewish events coming to an end and being fulfilled such as Daniel 7-12).

Professor Bock teaches this clearly: "...Luke sees in Jerusalem's collapse a preview, but with less intensity, of what the end will be like....He wants to make clear that when Jerusalem falls the first time, it is not yet the end. ***Nonetheless, the two falls are related and the presence of one pictures what the ultimate siege will be like. Both are eschatological events in God's plan, with the fall of Jerusalem being the down payment and guarantee of the end-time***" (my emphasis, Vol. II, pg. 1675).

In one way, the destruction of Jerusalem is Jesus coming in great power and glory to execute wrath and judgment against the earth. But this is/was a foretaste of his ultimate

consummation and return at the END of time (cf. Revelation 19:11-16): “They will look upon him who they have pierced...”

Jerusalem’s terrible judgment from God and the destruction of the temple reminds us all that to reject Christ to experience God’s wrath and punishment. The end of Jerusalem is a historical reality that all mankind must heed and remember the message of her destruction: She missed the visitation of Messiah (19:44). Jerusalem’s destruction then stands as an historical monument of the great consequences for disobeying God, rejecting Christ and seeking salvation in anything or anyone other than Christ.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man can come to the Father except through him (John 14:6).

The Glorious Coming of the Son of Man (vv. 25-33)

Although God’s wrath will be manifested for covenant unfaithfulness, nevertheless, salvation awaits those who are trusting in Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile!

Jesus uses Theophanic language of creation being cosmically upset and overturned, and people fearing to describe graphically the difficulty of the times just before the second coming of Christ (v. 25). This is Old Testament prophetic-apocalyptic imagery and language such as used in the Prophet Joel (also Isaiah and Ezekiel and other prophets; see also Isaiah 24:18-20; 34:4; Hag. 2:6, 21):

ESV Joel 2:30-31: "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

ESV Ezekiel 32:7-8: When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. ⁸ All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord GOD.

ESV Isaiah 13:6-11: Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty¹ it will come!⁷ Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. ⁸ They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. ⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰ For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

Jesus says that in the midst of the suffering and pain, the glorious Son of Man will appear to redeem His people and bring them to full restoration of all creation (Notice this prophetic foreshortening between the destruction of Jerusalem (near event to Jesus) and the glorious return of the Son of Man (now we know to be distant future)).

Daniel’s vision and prophecy will be fulfilled when the Son of Man appears with His Eternal Kingdom, revealing all of his glory:

*^{ESV} Daniel 7:13-14: I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.
¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

Jesus says that when His people see the world going the way it has always gone, even getting worse, and now threatening the Church (even though Jesus has conquered death and hell), that we must live by faith with our heads up knowing confidently that our full redemption, the restoration of all things is near (cf. Romans 8:15-25).

^{ESV} Psalm 18:2-3: The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

^{ESV} Acts 3:19-21: Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Living and persevering by faith in light of the end of the story (vv. 34-38)
But in light of this, we must watch our lives and doctrine closely (v. 34).

We should be reminded that we live on the “other side”- -this side- -of the cross and resurrection of Christ. We have historically experienced the beginning of the end with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Israelite temple. We have observed throughout history that nations continue to rise against nation, there are catastrophes throughout history and famines- -yet our God still reigns and Christ will return.

We are not to be moved by the course of unfolding sinful history- -the pattern of this age filled with fear and doubt and disbelief- -rather we are to stand up straight, chins held high and march on keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith (Heb. 12:1-4).

The temptation will be to be weighed down with the cares of this life and seek comfort and peace NOT IN CHRIST, but as the world does in dissipation and drunkenness. The temptations we experience must be resisted by God’s help to us in Christ lest we are surprised like the world when He returns (v. 34b).

In Christ, God’s people must live as those who are ever awake, that is, alert to His will, praying for strength to escape all of the temptations and traps and persecution of this present sinful age (v. 36).

Because we will all stand before the Son of Man on judgment day (v. 36c).

Will Jesus' return bring salvation or will it bring to you great fear? Will this be a glorious day of hope and a realization of all of your desires, or will it be a trap? Will this day be a trap to you when you realize all that you worked so hard and diligently to ignore has truly come to pass. The trap language that Jesus uses is picturesque. Many put off tomorrow, the future, until another day. I am reminded of the character Scarlet O'Hara that when her land was raped, her marriage was over and her life was in a shambles rather than repent, she said: "After all, tomorrow is another day..." meaning, "I will deal with it tomorrow."

Many of us do this. We say tomorrow, next week, next month I will live obediently by faith; I will recognize Jesus. But we must remember that today is the day of salvation, we must repent NOW (at this very moment). Don't put off your faith and repentance for your sins like a diet that you dread getting started- -repent now- -and believe.

Lest the day (the future) come upon you like a trap. When an animal is caught in a trap there is no warning, no "one last chance" - -it is trapped, and everything changes- -the animal is doomed to death. May we not be trapped by the Day of the LORD like an animal who cannot escape who was putting off the future until another day.

Deal with the future NOW.

We can all take heart and be encouraged that God has decreed every detail of history. God is sovereignly orchestrating each event and the future will continue to unfold according to God's plan. Jesus says that heaven and earth can pass away, but his words concerning the outworking of redemptive-history will never pass away. As Jesus says clearly:

^{ESV} Luke 21:33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Remember as the people of God you live in the end times awaiting the end of the end times- -the full consummation and return of Jesus Christ; in light of this, remember and be encouraged:

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Our next scene after Jesus' prophetic words of judgment upon Jerusalem: The leaders will act to lay hands on him to kill him (Luke 22:1ff), and thus God's decree, his sovereign place for history will be fulfilled in spite of evil and sinful man (cf. Acts 4:27-28). What God predestined for His people in the death of Christ would bring salvation.

What others meant for evil, God meant for good to bring about the salvation of many believing souls!

Thanks be to God for His Word! Thanks be to God for His Christ!

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