

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon February 14, 2021

Luke 21:12-19 "The First Century Persecution and Great Tribulation of the Church"

5 Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, 6 "These things which you see--the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." 7 So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?" 8 And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them. 9 But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately."

10 Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

12 But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. 13 But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. 14 Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head shall be lost. 19 By your patience possess your souls.

20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. 22 For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. 23 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. 24 And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

25 "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 26 men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. 27 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

29 Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. 35 For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 Watch therefore, and pray

always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

37 And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. 38 Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.

I. Introduction

- a. We continue with our study and meditations of Christ's Words to His disciples regarding the coming 1st century destruction of that very temple, with its massive stones and ornate decorations, its unspeakable opulence. Christ our Lord points their hearts, and ours, away from the transient temple/apostate Israel (seems so permanent!) to the Unshakeable Kingdom. The old, shakeable, puny system gives way to the Kingdom of Christ, our Rock. The vanishing, weak kingdom of confusion and fear, founded upon ignorance and unbelief, crumbles and washes away under God's storm of wrath, giving way to the Unshakeable Kingdom of Christ.
- b. The Signs of the coming destruction of the Temple
 - i. False Messiahs/False Movements v8
 - ii. Wars/Uprisings v9-10
 - iii. Great Earthquakes, Famines, Pestilences, Fearful Sights and Great Signs in the heavens v11
 - iv. Persecution by Jews and Romans v12-19
 - v. Jerusalem surrounded by armies/time to flee v20-24
 - vi. Signs in heavens/distress on earth- v25,26
 - vii. Then comes the Son of Man's Redemptive Judgment v27,28
- c. We've seen that all these predictions in this section of Luke occur prior to and leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, as signs to the disciples of how they can know the destruction of the temple is at hand. Our Lord gives them the signs they will see in order to know when to flee away from the wrath of God upon apostate Israel. Last week, we saw that earthquakes, famines, plagues, terrifying sights, and great signs in the heavens occurred prior to the AD70 destruction of the temple. In today's text, Christ tells His followers they will experience persecution and death at the hands of the Jews and Romans before the temple is destroyed, and He gives them important instructions how to be ready to faithfully endure the hatred, betrayal and murders.
- d. Luke 21:12-19 "The First Century Persecution and Great Tribulation of the Church"
 - i. Before all these things: Timing of persecution and Great Tribulation v12
 - ii. Persecution by the Jews and the Romans v12
 - iii. Persecution as Kingdom opportunity v13
 - iv. Preparation for Persecution: Settled Hearts v14
 - v. The Promise of God's wisdom during Persecution: v15
 - vi. Prepare for betrayal unto death by family and friends: v16
 - vii. Prepare to be hated by all if you identify with Christ: v17
 - viii. Perseverance in His Promises unto Salvation: v18,19

- II. Before all these things: Timing of persecution and Great Tribulation v12
- a. “But before all these things”
 - b. So, after telling His disciples about the coming signs of false messiahs, wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes and heavenly signs, the Lord then goes back from these events, letting His disciples know their persecution will begin before all these things. The first sign of the coming destruction of the temple will be their persecution.
 - i. Henry “The judgment shall begin at the house of God; you must smart first, for warning to them, that, if they have any consideration, they may consider, *If this be done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* See 1 Pt. 4:17, 18. But this is not all; this must be considered not only as the *suffering* of the *persecuted*, but as the *sin* of the *persecutors*. *Before* God’s judgments are brought upon them, they shall fill up the measure of their iniquity by *laying their hands on you.*” Note, The ruin of a people is always introduced by their sin; and nothing introduces a surer or sorer ruin than the sin of persecution. This is a *sign* that God’s *wrath* is coming upon a people to the uttermost when their *wrath* against the servants of God *comes to the uttermost.*”¹
 - c. But, what about the sequence of Matthew 24?
 - i. “7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows. 9 Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. 15 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.”

¹ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1899). Peabody: Hendrickson.

- ii. Here, Jesus says “tribulation” will begin AFTER the wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes. (v7) And then our Lord speaks of this Great Tribulation that will occur after the abomination of desolation shows up, a persecution of God’s people like has never occurred before or since.
- iii. So, it seems that Luke relates the general persecutions that continued in conjunction with Christ’s death, and that escalated as the disciples carried out the Great Commission. We see this persecution occurring all throughout the book of Acts, and mentioned in various epistles of the NT. These persecutions discussed by Luke are not the unprecedented Great Tribulation that would come upon the Church in ~62AD, but there are many similarities. The difference is intensity, severity, and how widespread. In the times prior to ~62AD, the persecuting Jews were limited by the presence of Roman law. No Roman citizen could be put to death without a Roman trial. But, the apostate Jews entered into a 7 year agreement with the Romans in 62AD, and the Romans granted the Jews the power of the sword during that 7 year timeframe. This began the vicious and intense murder of Christians under Nero’s reign, and the vast majority of Christians were executed during this time, by either Jewish or Roman actions. Never before or since has the Church been so close to extinction. But, by God’s grace, and as Christ prediction in Matthew 24:22, “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened”, the agreement between Rome and apostate Israel was cut short in 66AD when the Great War of judgment on Israel began, the war of Rome against Israel.

1. For more details on these points, see the following sermons from Pastor Phil Kayser:

- a. The Cry of the Martyrs

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=513161548207>

- b. The Great Tribulation Martyrs, Part I

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermon/84171518111>

- c. Rescue from Persecution

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermon/12418811141>

III. Persecution by the Jews and the Romans v12

- a. “they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.”
- b. Jesus tells His disciples to expect to be physically arrested, mistreated, tried by the synagogues and thrown into prison. Their connection with their practical religious past will be destroyed. They will be chased away from comfort and security, forced to flee because of hatred, unemployment, banishment and physical threats. And, not only will their own people harry them, they will be brought before civil authorities, both Jewish and Roman. This would raise the specter of capital punishment. We see all these things occur in NT and history.

- c. Persecute: to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away
 - i. to pursue (in a hostile manner)
 - 1. in any way whatever to harass, trouble, molest one
 - ii. to be mistreated, suffer persecution on account of something
- d. Note the evil duo: Jews and Romans. This is the devil's mode of operation throughout history, not just in this phase of Church history. Whenever righteousness fails and evil prevails, the Church and State can be overtaken by the devil's evil schemes and used for his dark purposes: to steal, kill and destroy. We see this in John's vision in Revelation 17
 - i. "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." 3 So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. 5 And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement."

IV. Preparation for Persecution: Kingdom opportunity v13

- a. "13 But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony."
- b. After telling His disciples about their coming persecution, He detours to teach them about how to be ready for persecution. They had only asked about when the temple would be destroyed, and what signs would precede the destruction. Yet, our Lord, in His kindness, gives them more than what they request. They need more knowledge. He shores them up with Great Promises that will surely see them through persecutions, even the Great Tribulation.
- c. First, Christ teaches His followers to have the proper perspective on persecution. Instead of seeing it as something only to hate and avoid, only a grief, Jesus brings out the sunshine. Their persecution will be an occasion for testimony, an opportunity to preach the Kingdom of God, to share of God's greatness and our great sin and need for redemption, and to preach the Good News of Christ's atonement, resurrection and reign.
 - i. Christ had already given them this lesson in prior teachings. Luke 6 "22 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."
 - 1. "the Son of Man's sake" – total, unswerving allegiance to Christ

- d. Henry “Your being set up thus for a mark, and publicly *persecuted*, will make you the more taken notice of and your doctrine and miracles the more enquired into; your being brought *before kings and rulers* will give you an opportunity of preaching the gospel to them, who otherwise would never have come within hearing of it; your suffering such severe things, and being so hated by the worst of men, men of the most vicious lives, will be a testimony that you are good, else you would not have such bad men for your enemies; your courage, and cheerfulness, and constancy under your sufferings will be a testimony for you, that you believe what you preach, that you are supported by a divine power, and that the Spirit of God and glory rests upon you.”²
- V. Preparation for Persecution: Settled Hearts v14
- a. “Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer”
 - b. A settled heart: the only path to success in persecution is a heart settled on God’s promises and God’s Presence. The persecution is coming. It cannot be avoided. First, rejoice at the opportunity to preach the Gospel, and don’t spend time worrying and fretting about what you will say in the synagogues or the courtrooms, but rather do God’s will as you can, carry out the Great Commission, and do not allow worry to distract you from today’s work.
 - c. Henry “Instead of setting your hearts on work to contrive an answer to informations, indictments, articles, accusations, and interrogatories, that will be exhibited against you in the ecclesiastical and civil courts, on the contrary, *settle it in your hearts*, impress it upon them, take pains with them to persuade them *not to meditate before what you shall answer*; do not *depend* upon your own wit and ingenuity, your own prudence and policy, and do not *distrust or despair* of the immediate and extraordinary aids of the divine grace.”³
- VI. Preparation for Persecution: The Promise of God’s wisdom during Persecution: v15
- a. “for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.”
 - b. Jesus knows His followers will be tempted to worry about their defense in the synagogues and courtrooms. He has already pointed them away from fear: “do not be terrified” (v9). And, now, our dear Lord provides a specific remedy against this specific fear. He is so near that He will actually give them wise words of victory at the very moment the words are needed, and not a single enemy, not a single sneaky lawyer, will be able to overcome the persuasive truth and power of their wise words. Again, Jesus our Lord gives them more than they requested.
 - c. Remember God’s great promise regarding our need for wisdom:
 - i. James 1 “5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him

² Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1899). Peabody: Hendrickson.

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ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

- ii. By giving His disciples such great promises, Christ shores up their faith to ask for wisdom and believe they will receive it when needed.
 - d. Henry “When Christ gives to his witnesses a *mouth and wisdom*, they are enabled to say that both for him and themselves which *all their adversaries are not able to gainsay or resist*, so that they are silenced, and put to confusion. This was remarkably fulfilled presently after the pouring out of the Spirit, by whom Christ gave his disciples this *mouth and wisdom*, when the apostles were brought before the priests and rulers, and answered them so as to make them ashamed, Acts 4, 5, and 6.”⁴
- VII. Prepare for betrayal unto death by family and friends: v16
- a. “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death.”
 - b. Now, Jesus brings in perhaps the hardest thing of all. They have learned their past churches will reject them. They have learned the civil magistrate will treat them unfairly. They see prison and death in their future. Yet, perhaps the consolations of friends and family will soothe? No, says Christ, do not expect even your family or friends to love you when you are persecuted. These family and friends, not loyal to Christ, cannot remain loyal to you in times of peril, dear disciples.
 - c. Note, brothers and sisters, how often we may endure many losses, but how we may turn back from Christ when it threatens our relationships with our lost loved ones and friends.
 - d. Henry ““Your own relations will betray you (v. 16), *your parents, brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends*; so that you will not know whom to put a confidence in, or where to be safe.”⁵
 - i. The disciples will be on the run with no safe place, unsure. Rejoice, settled hearts, no terror, though. Even in the worst of circumstances, not even a hair of our head is lost, even if martyrdom is God’s plan.
 - e. And, note that this most painful betrayal is connected to some of the disciple’s being executed. Some will die in persecution, and this execution may even occur because of betrayal by family or friends.
- VIII. Prepare to be hated by all if you identify with Christ: v17
- a. “And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.”
 - b. Widespread, essentially unlimited scorn and marginalization will follow the disciples everywhere they go. The disciples will have nowhere to turn except to God and to one another. They must learn to stop seeking safety or favor anywhere else. A culture separated from God and His righteousness can only

⁴ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1899). Peabody: Hendrickson.

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hate God and His people. Such a culture cannot be tolerant of the Gospel of God or His messengers, His ambassadors. Such widespread hatred is a sign of impending doom upon that culture if it refuses to repent.

- c. Henry “This is worse than death itself, and was fulfilled when the apostles were not only *appointed to death*, but made a *spectacle to the world*, and counted as the *filth of the world*, and the *offscouring of all things*, which every body loathes, 1 Co. 4:9, 13. They were hated of *all men*, that is, of all bad men, who could not bear the light of the gospel (because it discovered their evil deeds), and therefore hated those who brought in that light, flew in their faces, and would have pulled them to pieces. The wicked world, which hated to be reformed, hated Christ the great Reformer, and all that were his, for his sake. The rulers of the Jewish church, knowing very well that if the gospel obtained among the Jews their usurped abused power was at an end, raised all their forces against it, put it into an ill name, filled people’s minds with prejudices against it, and so made the preachers and professors of it odious to the mob.”⁶

IX. Perseverance in His Promises unto Salvation: v18,19

- a. “But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls.”
- b. The final promise points the disciples to eternal realities, unchangeable and unshakeable. Their path to success in persecution must include their sure faith that God is with them and will, because of Christ, keep them. None can take them away from Him, even in death.
- c. Note, Jesus does not promise they will all survive the persecution. He’s already told them that some will die. Here is a moment of powerful consideration: essentially, Jesus is asking each one of them, and us, if we trust Him with the outcome of our lives. Are we prepared to lose everything as a result of allegiance to Him, even as He chooses to protect others of His people from persecution?
- d. Think of Revelation 6:9-11 (5th seal martyrs), 7:9-17 (the innumerable martyrs) contrasted with Rev 7:1-8 (those sealed by God to survive the tribulation). Are you ok with whatever outcome may have in your life if such persecution were to occur?

X. Questions to know, love and obey God

⁶ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1899). Peabody: Hendrickson.