

INTRODUCTION

- We continue to follow the events of the last week of Jesus' life before His crucifixion. For an overview, we remember that Jesus has entered into Jerusalem in His "triumphal entry." He is very aware of what is about to take place. There is an initial excitement found in the multitudes as He enters, and large crowds are gathering to Him daily as He teaches in the temple courts.
- The leadership has set themselves against Him, and He has thwarted their efforts to discredit Him before the people as they have asked Him questions about His authority, His beliefs about the resurrection and judgment, as well as controversies about paying taxes. After answering them with great wisdom, He turns on the leadership and discredits them in their hypocrisy.
- As we come to this section, I believe it is accurate to say that this is one of the most controversial passages in the Gospels, especially related to eschatology or the "end times." I am purposefully going to try to not get into the area in details (except for what is in the passage), and do not intend to try to give a details explanation of my understanding of the subject.
- In particular, I am going to try to resist the temptation to go to the other accounts (found in Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13) and try to focus on what Luke records for us. In other words, I am not going to try to harmonize and bring in all the things said in these three (which would itself be a legitimate study), but rather, I am going to try to focus on what Luke records Jesus saying to His disciples, what they were to learn from it, and some applications for ourselves.

EXPOSITION

I. THE SPLENDOR OF THE TEMPLE – v.5

- Luke tells us that there were those with Jesus who ***spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations***. At that point the temple had been rebuilt under the care of Herod. This project had been going on for 46 years according to John 2:20. The project will go on for several more years before it was considered completed.
- The disciples are apparently admiring, or simply pointing out, the exquisite beauty and costliness of the temple. One question we could ask is why this was pointed out to the Lord. I have wondered if it was in response to His attack on the scribes and Pharisees, feeling a bit nervous, and making small talk. Perhaps they are simply responding to the amount of wealth displayed in the building in response to His comment about the widow.
- Regardless of the reason (and we don't know for sure), they point out this fact to the Lord.

II. JESUS' PROPHECY CONCERNING THE TEMPLE – v.6

- Jesus responds by saying ***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***. This is a way of speaking meaning total destruction and desolation of the temple complex. While it may appear impressive now, He prophesies a time when the temple will again be destroyed. This had already happened twice in the history of Israel, first to Solomon's temple, then to Zerubbabel's. Many, including perhaps the disciples at this point, were expecting that the coming of the Messiah would mean His leading Israel in political and religious victory over the nations.
- Jesus has already prophesied about Jerusalem's destruction in Luke 19:41-44. We see there that He is not only speaking of the destruction of the temple, but of the city of Jerusalem. Something other than what they initially expected would happen, but the utter destruction of the Jewish socio/religious/political capital.

III. THE DISCIPLES QUESTIONS REGARDING THE TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION – v.7

- Here the disciples are obviously concerned, and ask two questions: ***Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?*** The first question is asking about timing, and the second is asking about those things that will precede the destruction.
- Notice that the question they ask is particularly related to "these things." In this passage, they are asking specifically about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. In the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel, they ask two other questions including ***what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?***
- For whatever reason, Luke does not include those questions, and I believe it is significant that Matthew's account is about twice as long as Luke's in Jesus' answer.
- My primary point is that, as Luke presents it, the main question and Jesus' answer is related to the destruction of Jerusalem. One reason I am pointing this out is that in many discussions about this passage, the whole issue of Jerusalem's destruction is all but overlooked, and all of Jesus' answer is directed to the question about His second coming in glory. However, the context is clearly primarily related to when the temple will be destroyed, and what events will lead up to it.

IV. THE SIGNS LEADING UP TO THE TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION

- With this in mind, how does Jesus answer? Do to the length of His answer, this week I would just like for us to consider the first four parts of that answer. Lord willing, we will come to the rest next week.

A. The Coming of False Teachers – v.8

- Jesus answers **Take heed that you not be deceived.** He immediately warns them. He says to them that things will happen which will, if not watched for, will lead to deception. The deception that He warns even His close disciples, those who are His apostles, about is the deception of false teachers. He warns them that **many will come in My name.** They are to be alert to the fact that even though some will come, claiming the authority of the Lord Jesus, using His Name, who come only to deceive. Deceptive people will not even keep from using the name of Jesus Christ to seek to deceive the disciples of Christ.
- In doing so they will say two things. The first is **I am He.** He warns of some who will come and claim to be the Messiah, to be the Lord Jesus Christ. They will speak of themselves as being the new Messiah, the incarnation of Christ. They will say though Jesus had been absent from them, that He has now returned in this new form. And they will do so face to face with the disciples that He was speaking to right then and there.
- The second thing they will claim is **The time has drawn near.** They will claim that the end has come, that they are to follow them. Jesus says very plainly, **Therefore do not go after them.**
- This is quite a warning when we consider that it was said to those who walked with Him for three years in His ministry. This shows the power, the influence, and the persuasiveness of these false teachers, and He warns them not to follow after them or their teaching.
- What is implicit here is that when Jesus returns, they will know it. No one will have to prove it. No one will have to wonder "is this really Him? This is the first thing leading up to the temple's destruction, the appearance of false Messiahs.

B. Wars – v.9-10

- The second thing He gives as a sign is their hearing **of wars and commotions.** There will be national and political upheavals, men will be at war. This would certainly include the Roman empire who would continue to exert their power to rule. At this stage they should not expect world peace. What Jesus was about to do would not stop those wars, as some of them expected.
- In the light of such things, He tells them **do not be terrified.** There is almost nothing that will shake a people than to be aware of the ongoing battles and wars of the nations. There is the reality of death, oppression of ungodly armies. The temptation is to believe that God is not in control, that things are merely coming to an end, and despair follows. But Jesus says **these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.**

C. Natural – v.11

- Together with these signs, Jesus says that there will be other natural disasters, including **great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences, and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.** Nature itself will continue to display the effects of the fall on it. There will continue to be great poverty, death as a result of lack of rain and crops to feed people. There will also be signs from heaven. This likely includes supernatural evidences of judgement upon men.

D. Persecution – vv.12-19

- The last sign that Jesus speaks to them is that of personal persecution. **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.** This is referring to what they, as apostles and representatives of the Lord Jesus, will suffer. They will be caught by the authorities, both religious and civil, and brought into the court systems to give an answer for what they are teaching about the Kingdom of God. They were not to think that they had such divine protection now as followers of Christ that they would escape difficulty. This was very different than the anticipate that one Messiah came, they would be protected by His power, and immediately overcome their enemies.
- The next thing that Jesus says is very significant. He tells them that these difficulties will **turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.** God intends to use these circumstances for them to be able to speak before these men about the Gospel, about Jesus Christ. As we read, particularly in the book of Acts, we see that this is just what happened. As they were brought before the High Priest, the court of the Sanhedrin, before Roman rulers like Felix and Festus, and eventually before Caesar Himself, they would have an opportunity to testify of Christ and His work as the Savior.
- What Jesus promises at this point is wonderful. As they anticipate what they will say in those settings, they will be personally helped by the Lord Jesus to give that testimony. **Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.** He will so enable them by His Wisdom, the very wisdom that He used in response to the accusations of Himself that week in Jerusalem, they too would have the ability to speak in a way that would refute them.
- Next we see that not only will there be this kind of persecution from those opposed to Jesus, but it comes much closer to home. He says **You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends.**

This is perhaps the greater difficulty, to find one's very family and friends turning against them, betraying them, turning them over to the authorities. As a result of this betrayal He says **they will put some of you to death**. Some of those He spoke to in that moment of history have just been told how they will die. They will die as a result of these betrayals, and from the history of the early church we know this came through such means as being thrust through with a spear, crucifixion, stoning, and being boiled in oil. This was true not only for those apostles, but also others who would follow their teachings. Jesus says **you will be hated by all for My name's sake**. It is for the Name of Christ, for preaching the Gospel, for proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and the only Savior to be worshipped, that they would be outcasts, and considered the scum of the earth.

- In this all He does not paint a picture of acceptance, tolerance, and reception by the world, but even as He will be rejected and killed, so some of them will also suffer the same end.
- The Lord wonderfully comforts them in the midst of this news which at first may seem depressing and despairing. He says **But not a hair of your head shall be lost**. Even when you are tortured and killed, you will not lose even the most seemingly insignificant part. God is keeping track, and will ensure that they will be preserved even as they lose their lives.
- The last thing He does here is call them to perseverance. They should not, in response to this, decide to give up. One could easily think "if this is what following Christ is about, then why do so?" "What is the benefit of all of this? Why go through this to follow the Lord even to rejection and death?" Instead of this, He tells them **By your patience possess your souls**. This word patience means perseverance. They are to persevere. They are to continue to trust the Lord Jesus. They are not to go apostate. He says in doing so they will "posses" their souls. This word means acquire, gain, control. They will not, even while losing their life, lose their soul. It is by continuing to be faithful to the Lord in the midst of all of these difficulties, gain eternal life.
- So in answer to their question as to when the temple, and Jerusalem, will be destroyed Jesus does not paint a picture of ease, popularity, peace, and prosperity. Rather, He tells them that the Kingdom of God and the proclamation of the Gospel will be lived in a world of difficulty.

APPLICATION

How then can we apply these things to our life? How are we to take these specific marks of the time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, and see them as more than historical information?

First, we should recognize that we still live in the same chapter of redemptive history. Things are not significantly different now than they were then. These are things that will continue to mark our fallen world until the time of Christ, and the restoration of all things in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

What is happening now in the history of the world really isn't that different. Some will try to mark out how things have increased in their intensity in these various areas, and so we are closer to the end than ever before. As a side note, we are, as a result of the Internet and modern technology, much more aware of what is going on in much of the world. Regardless as to whether that is true (regarding the intensity), we are certainly closer to the end every day. The question really isn't "how close are we?", but "what are we to be doing as we await His return?" We are to be faithful in the here and now, and realize that we don't live in a golden age.

As long as the world remains, and until Christ's return, we will to some degree know the realities of false teachers, war, natural disasters, and persecution. What are we to do? Essentially the same things as Jesus directed them, realizing that we are not promised escape just because we are Christians.

- 1.) Don't be deceived. False teachers, even those who claim to be Jesus and those who claim to speak in His authority, will continue. To be secure against them we must know Scriptures, we must walk with God, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and have discernment. When someone says "the end is near", we respond by saying "that is certainly true" and continue to seek to be faithful to the Gospel...therefore don't be deceived.
- 2.) Do not be terrified. Things like war and natural disasters are a result of sin. As long as sin remains, these will as well. We are not to despair, but to trust in the Lord that there is a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We continue to know God as the one who rules over the nations as well as nature itself. Things happen, but they don't happen outside of God's sovereign control...therefore don't be afraid.
- 3.) Give testimony. When things happen and we stand before others in various ways and they question us about the Christian faith, we should see them as opportunities to speak of the Lord Jesus. We speak to them about His Lordship, His death and resurrection for sin, His return in judgement to set all things right. If it comes to a point of severe persecution in our nation, then we see it as an opportunity to testify of our love and trust in Christ.
- 4.) Persevere. Even if we are called to die for our faith, if others hate us, if we are betrayed by family and friends because of our love for Christ and His church, we will not ultimately lose anything. We are to press on with the faith that in doing so we gain our souls forever. We do not fear the one who can destroy our body, our reputation, our stuff, but to not respond to those temptation by departing from Christ, because He alone has the words of eternal life.

If you are not a Christian, what will you do in the face of these things? How will you handle these realities of life? How will you respond the difficulties that are sure to come your way? I urge you to look to the Lord Jesus Christ.