

Luke 21: A Glimpse of “Things to Come”?

[A few Contexts:

Biblical: Jesus is now in Jerusalem. We know what happens to him there. He arrived with a triumphant procession. Crowds love him. The religious leaders have ordered him to stop and have tried to trip him up. Three times he has already told his disciples that he is going to be killed. There is an enormous amount of expectation. Has Jesus now come to turn the order of the world on its head? Is he the revolutionary leader they have been praying for? Is the end of all things (i.e. political oppression, injustice, sickness, suffering) now?

Cultural & Political: Luke is likely writing in 80-90CE. This means he is aware of the **persecution** some Christians face in their local communities and, in some cases sanctioned by the Roman authorities (cf. Nero and the fire of Rome in 64CE). He is aware of the spiritual, political and psychological effects of the **destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by Roman forces in 70AD**. He is likely aware of the **bread shortages** in Rome in 70CE. He is certainly aware of the **First Jewish-Roman war of 72/73CE** ending with the assault on Masada. He might even be aware of the **pagan temple built in Rome to house the artifacts of the Temple of Jerusalem in 75CE**. And certainly, he was aware of the change in weather and sunlight and the dramatic stories coming from Pompeii, following the **eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79CE**. By all accounts, this was **another** end of the world for those living in the Palestine Land bridge of the Ancient Near East.

Historical: End of the world speculation has been part of the Judeo-Christian imagination since the beginning of the Church. Since Jesus, the Church has considered itself living in the Last Days. These are the days when the kingdom of God wrestles with the kingdoms of the world. Christians bear witness to Christ's rule in the face of spiritual powers of oppression that are incarnate in the world. The divine end of all things is the restoration, healing and renewal of God's authority and plan for God's creation.

21:5-6 Destruction of the Temple

21: 7-19 Signs and Persecutions

⁷ They asked Jesus, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?' ⁸And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and, "The time is near!" Do not go after them.

⁹ 'When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.']

¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹² 'But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; ¹⁵for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your souls.

[21:20-24 Jerusalem will be Destroyed

21: 25-28 Son of Man

21:29-33 The Fig Tree

21:34-38 Be on Guard

³⁴ 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

³⁷ Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. ³⁸And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.]

Luke 21: A Glimpse of “How Things are Now”

The church has not yet birthed the Kingdom of God. It is still in the making. The wrestling between kingdoms continues. This was true in the Early Church, in the Post-Constantine Church, in the Medieval Church, in the Renaissance Church, in the Reformation Church, in the Modern Church. We are still in the Last Days. Spiritually speaking, we are always in the Last Days.

In this long suspension of time, we as Followers of Church, run a relay marathon taken up by the early Church, who received their baton from their Jewish ancestors and who hand the baton to us. We are asked to continue the marathon, to run the race set before us. To endure.

This takes practice. The spiritual practice of endurance.

The Spiritual Practice of Endurance

1. Recognize that Life is a Marathon not a Sprint.
2. Train for the Marathon.
 - a. Practice Breathing
 - b. Practice Awareness (watch for obstacles)
 - c. Expect and Work Through Cramps
3. Recognize that this Marathon is a Team Relay
 - a. Get in Sync with your Relay Companions
 - b. Pass the Baton
 - c. Take the Baton
 - d. Work Together
4. When you Feel the Cramps Kicking in:
 - a. Be Humble (know your limits)
 - b. Be Vocal (confess)
 - c. Be Gentle (you are a good & faithful servant)
5. Remember, We are a Sunrise People. We are a Morning Faith, Albeit an Early Morning People, While it is Still Dark.