

## Your Redemption Is Drawing Near

Luke 21:20-38

November 21, 2010

Last week we looked at the questions the disciples asked Jesus after He predicted a surprising end to the temple. They asked when the temple would be destroyed as He described and how they would know it was about to happen. We then looked at the beginning of His answer to the second question. Today, we will make our way through the rest of that answer.

We noted last week that Jesus gave false starts and told His hearers to not worry about them. Then Jesus told them about the suffering those who were His would have to suffer before the time came. It is only here that Jesus finally got around to answering the question of the signs that would accompany the destruction of the temple.

Not surprisingly, the fall of the **temple** is accompanied by the siege and fall of Jerusalem. When the city is surrounded by armies, the destruction would be near. This would be the time to flee into the mountains. Those who are in the city are to get out. Those who are not in the city are not to try to enter. The reason Jesus gave for all of this is that, “[T]his is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.” (v.22) This suffering of the people of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple that would follow are the fulfillment of the messages God had given through the prophets for generations. It was not some new, unexpected thing that Jesus was talking about, even though those who heard Him heard it that way. It was something they should have expected.

God tells His people what He is up to and invites them to get on board with it. His people have always mis-heard Him, however, choosing to emphasize the parts of His plan they like and minimize the parts they don't. We rationalize our lives and behavior and make up our own version of the truth. This was true about Jesus. It was true about the fall of Jerusalem, and it is still true today.

Around Christmas and Easter time every year we pause to remember that the people killed Jesus because He wouldn't live up to all the hype. The Jews had so focused on the image of the Messiah as the conquering king that they forgot about the image of the suffering servant. They thought they were the ones suffering unjustly because of their steadfast righteousness and holding fast to the things of God. They read the suffering servant texts as being about them. Jesus demonstrated they were wrong. Those passages were about Him.

In the same way, they had taken what God had done and the way in which He met with them and considered them permanent. God's plan had always been to include the Gentiles in salvation. From the beginning He intended to bless the whole world through Abraham and his descendants. The temple was never meant to be permanent. From God's perspective it was a temporary fix to the problem of sin Jesus would solve on the cross.

This issue of perspective is an important thing. Just as Jesus looked at the temple from **God's** perspective, we need to look at our selves from the same point of view. We look at ourselves compared with the

world and we think we are doing okay. Sure, we compare well with those around us, but that is not the comparison we are called to make.

First of all we are to compare the **truth** about ourselves, as revealed in the holy light of Jesus, with the image of God, also revealed in Jesus. Instead of asking how we compare with each other, we are to ask, first and foremost, how we compare with Him. We need to look honestly at our selves and see how our holiness, hearts and behavior compare with our Master's. This comparison will never go well, if we do it correctly. It keeps us humble and it reminds us all that we are only allowed in God's presence at all because of His grace and Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.

The second comparison we all need to make is between who and what we are **now** to what we were. Each of us needs to look back and see the person he or she used to be: all of his or her successes, victories, times of great faith, and sins, faults, failures, and attempts at faithfulness that have fallen short. If we are in Christ and growing in our faith and dependance on Him, we will be able to see progress toward grace and living in His image. The evidence for this progress will be in the ways in which we respond to people, the temptations and sins that get the better of us, the temptations and sins that no longer get the better of us, the way in which our heart reaches out to others, and all the other things of life that define who we are and effect our relationships. Just as the first test never ends well and keeps us humble, this test ought to end well and give us hope. It shows us the changes the Holy Spirit is making in us. It is the demonstration that we are growing closer to God and are

better able to love Him and each other. We need to examine ourselves on a regular basis for this growth because it is only this growth in the knowledge of God and dependance on Him that will keep us when trouble comes.

Jesus went on to describe the suffering that would befall the people of Jerusalem. It would be especially difficult for anyone who had a hard time traveling—like pregnant women and nursing mothers. Jesus described the time as one of great distress in the nation and of wrath against the people who lived there. They would be killed. They would be taken prisoner and scattered across the earth. The city of David, the holy city in which God chose to put His name, would, “. . . *be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*” (v.24) This brings to mind the messages of earlier prophets as they predicted the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian empire. In this case, Jerusalem was already under the thumb of Rome, but her relationship with that military power was about to change.

One of the truths about prophecy is it does not always get fulfilled at one **time**. Sometimes, one prophecy will have multiple fulfillments. Other times, part of the prophecy will be fulfilled with another part waiting a long time before it comes to fruition. This prophecy is one of the latter type. Many, if not most, of Jesus' hearers would live to see that we have read so far come true. Mounting unrest and a growing expectation of the coming messiah turned Jerusalem into a powder-keg of political instability over the decades after Jesus' crucifixion. Just as Jesus predicted in last week's text,

there were many who came after Him and claimed to be the messiah. Some of them led revolts that Rome put down violently. Riots became more and more common. The people became harder and harder to control. Finally, in the late 60's open revolt broke out and the Jewish people declared themselves free of the Roman Empire.

Things began well since the Roman army only had a stabilizing force in Judea, but it did not take long for reinforcements to arrive—lots of them. Jerusalem was placed under siege. In AD 70, the city fell and the Roman army, with its mercenaries from all over the world, began pillaging, ransacking, and destroying the holy city. Rome determined to have done with the Jewish problem once for all as the city was emptied of residents just as Jesus said. The Gentiles of the army marched through the streets to the temple where they desecrated it and began tearing it apart. When they were done, not one stone was left on another, just as Jesus prophesied. What was left is still there today. It is a foundational retaining wall that was built into one of the walls of the temple. Jews still go there to pray and to place their prayers in scrolls in cracks in the wall. Called the “wailing wall,” it is all that is left of God’s magnificent house.

This is the part of Jesus’ prophecy that has come true already. We are in the times of the Gentiles, waiting for them to be fulfilled. God still has a special place in His heart for the Jews, as we will see next year, but He works now through the church, which is mostly Gentile. This also means that the rest of the prophecy is yet to be

fulfilled. We are still waiting for what comes next. Let’s look and see what Jesus said it is.

Jesus said, “*There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.*” (vv.25,26) As the time for the next part of the prophecy draws near, nature itself will be in an uproar. The heavenly bodies that portend the changing of the seasons and that God gave us to help us mark time will be affected. The oceans will roar and toss. Fear and apprehension will grip the people of the earth as the very things that seem so permanent and stable will seemingly fall into chaos.

To get a sense of what this may look like, we need only to look at the news that has been flooding in over the last several years of natural disasters all over the world. Tidal waves in Indonesia, earthquakes in Haiti, and countless landslides, floods, hurricanes, storms, and other natural disasters have shaken our world in recent memory. Many people look around and say we are in the time of the end. Some of the signs point toward it, but we are not yet there. Revelation tells us about a world-wide system which will be set up and we will be required to deny Christ in order to participate in the marketplace. We will need Satan’s mark instead of God’s. As bad as things are that is not in place. There are signs as to how it may happen, but some prophecies remain to be fulfilled.

After the world is thrown into confusion, anguish, terror and apprehension, Jesus said, “*At that time they*

*will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” (v.27)* Jesus did not say He is coming back at the start of the problems. He said He is coming back as the world is thrown into chaos and the grip of fear because of them. Once the world has tried all of its solutions, tried to manage the wrath of God on its own, and failed miserably, then the solution will be revealed with power and great glory, coming in a cloud, just as He left. He may be coming in the midst of the chaos, but he is coming! Have not doubt about that. There is no question, no uncertainty. We await the return of Jesus, the Christ, not as a baby in a manger, but as the conquering King, bringing the Father’s justice to a world that is running as fast from Him as it can.

What is to be our response to these **signs**? Jesus gave us two. First, *“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (v.28)* As the world ducks and runs for cover, we are to stand up and lift up our heads. We can do the things the world finds unnatural because we are not of this world. We belong to a different kingdom and so we respond with joy when we see that kingdom breaking forth. We know that our redemption is drawing near and the end result of God’s purification and the manifestation of His glory lead to greater things that we can ever know without them. We have no need to fear, it is our Master and **Savior** that leads the charge. We can stand firm, with our heads held high, in the midst of the chaos because our Lord was vindicated in His resurrection and He is coming back to reign!

Before He gave us the second response to these signs, Jesus reminded the disciples that they view signs of what is to come all the time. We can be as certain of His return as we are of the coming of summer each year. We can also be certain that what He said will take place. He said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (v.33)* We are to **trust** that His word is true and rely on His Holy Spirit for the strength we need to stand firm.

Otherwise we will fall away, our strength will be sapped by the sins and cares of the world and we will be rendered weak and useless when the time arrives. Even worse, we will be caught by surprise and not prepared. With the rest of the world, those who are not careful, and whose hearts are burdened with sin and the cares of the world will be trapped as the planet is thrown into chaos by the breaking forth of God’s kingdom.

Finally, we have the last response Jesus commands to the coming of our redemption. After standing up and carefully guarding our hearts, we are to, *“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” (v.36)* We must **watch** and pray. While the weight of scripture suggests the church will be on earth until the very end, it also teaches we will be spared the worst of God’s wrath. We may need to deal with the wrath of the devil and his kingdom, but we will be spared the wrath of Him who is far more powerful. We can be thankful we have a King who reigns and will bring us into His kingdom when the time comes.