

Your Redemption Is Near

Advent: Hope, Peace, Love, Joy

Luke 21:5-28

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Progress or Cynicism

In the modern era we were taught to think of the world as something that grows slowly toward perfection, something that progresses. Sure, some scientists taught the world will end through a gradual decay. But Progress was the main worldview of the modern era. But if we're Christians, we can't put our hope in Progress. The Bible doesn't teach gradual progress. It doesn't even teach gradual decay from within. It promises a sudden, violent end imposed on the world from without.¹ As C.S. Lewis says, it will be like an extinguisher popped onto the candle, a brick flung at the gramophone, a curtain rung down on the play—Halt!² The Bible contradicts the myth of Progress.

But not only does the Bible contradict the myth of Progress, experience contradicts it! It doesn't take a scientist to see that this world is *not* making progress. It's full of sin and injustice, disease and brokenness, violence and hate. So, the modern man who put their hope in progress had their hopes dashed! They saw more atrocities over the last century than anyone could ever imagine. And so the modern man gave way to the postmodern man. We no longer live in an age of hope and optimism. We now live in an age of confusion and cynicism.

But regardless of what age we live in, as Christians we can have hope. Christ has come to save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21). And he will come again. And when he comes, he will put this world to its rights. His return is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13). If we trust in Christ, we can lift up our heads in confidence, because our redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28)!

That's what we learn in our text this morning.

Luke 21:5-28³

⁵And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶"As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."⁷And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"⁸And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them."⁹And 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."

¹⁰Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."¹¹There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.¹²But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness.¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer,¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.¹⁶You will be delivered up even by

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960, 100. Also Romano Guardini says, "For those who only take the natural or historical order of things seriously, every word about the end of the world is utter nonsense.

Nevertheless it will come, and not of itself, but of God. To accept this and to live accordingly, that is faith."

Guardini, Romano. *The Lord*. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 1996, 390.

² Lewis, 101

³ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

²⁰“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²²for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

This text is simply too long for me to walk through its entirety in 30 minutes. And so I want to focus my time this morning on the central section of this text in verses 12-19. But before I do that, I want to attempt to give an overview of the whole. As we look at the passage as a whole, we'll see its main emphasis, the main theme and purpose of the passage. Then as we look at verses 12-19, we'll see some ways to apply the main idea and aim.

OVERVIEW

Let's begin with an overview of the whole.

Chapter 21 comes at the end of a long section where Jesus is teaching in the temple (cf. Luke 20:1). The people he's teaching were admiring the temple; how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings (v. 5). He uses their remarks to teach about the destruction of the temple. In verse 6 he says, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” Jesus wants those listening to know that the temple will be destroyed. In fact, later he goes on to say that all of Jerusalem would be destroyed (vv. 20-24). And all these things came to pass in AD 70.

Judgment on Jerusalem

Jesus had already predicted the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 19. He said that Jerusalem would fall because the Jews failed to respond to Jesus at his first coming. The fall of Jerusalem would be God's judgment on the Jews (Luke 19:41-44).⁴ At Christ's first coming, God had visited his people to redeem them from their sins (Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; 19:44). He died on the cross for our sins. And anyone who responds to Jesus in faith can have peace with God. They can escape his vengeance and wrath. But the Jews rejected Jesus at his first coming. And so God brought judgment on them (cf. v. 22). The Romans came into Jerusalem and destroyed it.

The judgment on Jerusalem was not only judgment on the Jews. It was also a sign of the coming judgment on all who do not respond to Jesus in faith. At Jesus' first advent, he came to bring peace.

⁴ Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. The new international commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1997.

But anyone who doesn't respond to Jesus will face his judgment when he comes again, at his second advent. If you have not yet placed your faith in Christ, today is the day to trust him. The end will come on this world, like the Romans came on Jerusalem. And on that day it will be too late. This passage teaches us to turn to Jesus now in faith and repentance.

Don't lose focus

But it also teaches us how to live now between Christ's first and second coming. You see, the fall of Jerusalem is only one of the awful things that will mark the last days we're in now. And Jesus wants us to know that there will be a delay between the fall of Jerusalem and his second coming.⁵ And during that period of time there will be many signs that mark all of the days between his first and second advent.

These signs are highlighted in the structure of the passage. The passage is organized like a sandwich.

A¹ There will be false claims of the end and false Christs (vv. 8-9).

B¹ There will be general wars and earthly disasters (vv. 10-11).

C There will be persecution (vv. 12-19).

B² There will be a specific war on Jerusalem, and heavenly disasters (vv. 20-26).

A² Then the true Christ will come (v. 27).

The entire age between Christ's first coming and his second coming will be marked by false claims, wars, disasters, and persecution. The fall of Jerusalem was only one of those signs. But in the midst of all of this, the church shouldn't be distracted or led astray. You see there are a number of problems that emerge when we think of the last days. We might focus on false predictions of Christ's return (vv. 7-8). We might fear the final judgment (v. 26). And we may be led to faithless living because of false focus and fear (v. 34).

Jesus didn't want his disciples to get bogged down in any of this. And he doesn't want us to either. He wants us to stay focused on what's important. And in order to stay focused, we need to remember three clear truths from this passage. Christ will return to bring judgment and redemption (v. 27). That's certain. But we do not know when he will return (Mark 13:32). Therefore, we need to always be ready for his return (v. 34).⁶ These three truths give us the theme and aim of this passage. I'd summarize them this way. God is faithful; Christ will return. We should be faithful as we await Christ's return.

It is very difficult for people to believe in the second coming without trying to guess its date.⁷ C.S. Lewis said it's like trying to guess the plot of a drama in which we are the characters. But how can the characters in a play guess the plot? We're not the playwright, we're not the producer, we're not even the audience. We are on the stage. And our purpose on the stage is to play well the scenes we're in. This should concern us much more than to guess about the scenes that follow it.⁸

We don't know when the end will come. We only know that it *will* come. It's a waste of time to guess when it will be. When the play is over, we'll know. And then the Director of the play will have

⁵ Green

⁶ Lewis, 107

⁷ Lewis, 107

⁸ Lewis, 104

something to say to each of us about the part we played. Lewis concludes: “The playing is what matters infinitely.”⁹

And that’s what I want to talk about with the rest of our time this morning. How should we play our part now, as we wait for the certain return of Christ? I’ve already said what you should do if you’ve not yet trusted in Christ. For you, faithfulness starts with placing your faith in Christ. But what about those who have already trusted Christ? What does faithfulness look like for you? To answer that question, I want to look a little closer at the central section of our passage in verses 12-19.

FAITHFUL IN PERSECUTION (21:12-19)

The central section in this passage talks about persecution. This is one of the signs that we’re living in the last days. And it provides one of the opportunities for us to be faithful as we await Christ’s return.¹⁰

In verse 12, Jesus says to his disciples, “But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you.” For the apostles, this meant they would be persecuted before the fall of Jerusalem. For us, it means we will be persecuted before the return of Christ. If we belong to Christ, we will face opposition just like he did. We can count on it. We know that this is all part of God’s sovereign plan. The same God who ordained Christ’s first and second coming, also ordains suffering and opposition. God was sovereign over the opposition Jesus faced. And he’s sovereign over the opposition Jesus’ disciples face.

He is faithful in all of it. And we’re called to be faithful in all of it. The question is, what does faithfulness look like as we suffer and face opposition, as we wait for Christ’s return? These verses give us two ways to be faithful in persecution.

Proclamation

First, we should proclaim the gospel with the promise of his presence. Jesus says, when we’re persecuted, it provides an opportunity to bear witness (vv. 13-15).

Like I said earlier, the first way to respond to Christ, as we await his return, is to place our faith in Christ. But as Paul says in Romans 10: How can people believe if they’ve never heard the gospel? And how can people hear the gospel if we don’t preach the gospel? And how will people preach the gospel unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

We will be opposed by those who reject Christ. But instead of being discouraged by this fact, we should see it as an opportunity. It’s an opportunity to tell others about the peace Jesus brought at his first coming. It’s an opportunity for us to tell others Christ died for sinners. And he was raised from the dead. It’s an opportunity to call people to faith and repentance.

This is a scary thing. But God enables what he requires. We don’t have to worry about what we’ll say when we’re opposed. Jesus will give us a mouth and wisdom (v. 15). The parallel passage in Mark 13 tells us the Holy Spirit will speak through us as we proclaim the gospel (Mark 13:11). This is consistent with what Jesus told us in the Great Commission. We’re called to proclaim the gospel. But we’re called to proclaim the gospel in light of the promise that Christ is with us until the end of

⁹ Lewis, 106

¹⁰ Cf. Garland, David E. *Luke*. Zondervan exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011.

the age (Matt. 28:20). So how can we be faithful to God as we await Christ's return? First of all, we should proclaim the gospel with the promise of his presence.

Perseverance

Second, we should persevere in the faith with the promise of his protection. This comes out in verses 16-19. Jesus says we'll be delivered up even by our family, and some of us will be put to death. We'll be hated by all because of Jesus. But not a hair of our head will perish. Therefore, we're called to persevere, or to endure. It is by this perseverance that we will gain our lives, or our souls.

When we face persecution, there's a temptation to give up. You've heard it said, "if you can't beat them, join them." When the world opposes us, sometimes we're tempted to just join the world. It seems safer. But it's not. Remember what Jesus said? "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits [his soul]?" (Luke 9:25).

Jesus promises us that if we persevere in persecution we will be protected. Not a hair of our head will perish. Now this can't mean that we won't die if we're faithful to him. In verse 16, we're told some of Jesus' followers will be put to death.¹¹ But we do have a promise that we will not perish eternally. When we face judgment, we don't have to be afraid. We won't perish in that day. This is drawn out in verse 28. After Jesus enumerates the signs of the last days, he says in verse 27, "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Then we come to, what I believe is, the key verse in the whole passage. In verse 28, he says, "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

What this means is that the signs of Jesus' return shouldn't cause fear for those who belong to Christ. And the return of Christ shouldn't cause fear for those who belong to Christ. Sure, they should cause fear and foreboding for the world (v. 26). But not for those who believe.

We can have confidence that when Christ returns that our redemption is drawing near. Not our judgment, but our redemption! This is our hope, not something that we need to be afraid of! We have a promise of eternal protection. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This promise enables us to persevere in the face of persecution.

As we wait for Christ's return, we will face persecution. We will face opposition. But we don't have to be afraid. The Holy Spirit is present with us and enables us to proclaim the gospel. And the promise of our eternal protection enables us to persevere in the face of persecution. For on the last day, we will gain our lives. They may kill our bodies now. But on that day, we will receive our resurrection bodies (cf. Luke 20:27-40).¹²

Are you ready for Christ's return? God is faithful; Christ will return. Are you living faithful lives as you await his return?

Conclusion

As many of you know, my wife lost her mom earlier this year. It's been hard on our family. Thanksgiving was especially hard. But we also see that there have been good things that have come from it. It's brought our family together, for one. But it's also got us thinking about eternity,

¹¹ Green

¹² Green

especially Maggie's dad. He's read a couple of books on heaven and we all rejoice knowing that Susan is no longer suffering, but with Jesus.

My father-in-law has also begun preparing for his own death. He's only 71. But he's realized he won't live forever either. So he's begun planning so that when he does kick the bucket, everything will be in order for us.

Now a man of 71 doesn't need to be thinking about death all of the time. And Steve's not. But he should always take death into account. It would be foolish to presume another 20 years of life. And he would be foolish to not update his will and things like that. And so he's doing that sort of thing.

Here's the point. What death is to the 71-year-old man, the second coming is to all of us. We need to remember that life is short. It's provisional. We're in the last days. And Christ could return at any moment. In fact, his return is near! We need to be ready. We need to live our lives now as though this could be our last day.¹⁵ You need to place your faith in him now, if you haven't already. And we need to be faithful now as we await his return.

Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

¹⁵ Illustration adapted from Lewis, 110.