

## Luke 21: Getting the Big picture

Proposition: While this passage is directed to the Jews specifically it encourages us to look up and keep the big picture and not get bogged down in the stuff of life.

If you are someone who finds at times that life is so full of so much activity and need and responsibility that dealing with today's issues seems to absorb all your focus. Then I pray that this passage today will be especially refreshing for you as it was for me Tuesday morning.

We pick up Dr Luke's account of the life and teaching of Jesus as Jesus is in the final week before being crucified to pay the fine for your sins and for mine.

On Sunday we saw him entering Jerusalem as a king. On Monday we saw him sorting out the temple system as a high priest and on Tuesday we have just read of how he the Lamb of God was carefully examined in his authority, integrity and theology by his accusers. As we get to Luke 21 this morning it is still Tuesday in that final week and there is a sudden contrast of activity.

People have been arguing with Jesus trying to find fault in him so that they don't need to respond to him and follow him, they have set trap after trap for him unsuccessfully and Jesus had answered them so skilfully that none dared say another word to him. They were gob smacked and didn't know what to say. And in contrast to people arguing with Jesus so they can find some excuse not to follow Him and worship Him Jesus is observed watching 'how' people give at the temple offering box. Notice he is not watching how much they give but the attitude in which they give and one poor widow stands out in particular.

***1Jesus looked up and saw some rich people tossing their gifts into the offering box. 2He also saw a poor widow putting in two pennies. 3And he said, "I tell you that this poor woman has put in more than all the others. 4Everyone else gave what they didn't need. But she is very poor and gave everything she had."***

In total contrast to these men who want to argue with Jesus and trap Jesus so they can have him arrested Jesus is watching 'how' people are giving and he notices this woman who doesn't just give the spare change in her wallet at the end of the week, she doesn't just give a convenient amount out of her extra discretionary money, this woman gives sacrificially. It's only a few cents but it costs her something. Its an act of worship. She is not trying to tip God or give something because its the right thing to do, she gives all that she has. It costs her something.

You might be shocked to know that  
**JESUS WATCHES HOW WE GIVE**

But he does. If what you give on Sunday is just to tip God or to give what is convenient, I wonder if we wouldn't be wiser just going to MacDonald's and buying a burger with that money because giving is primarily about worship and sacrifice. Paul wrote that God loves a hilariously cheerful giver. I believe that the tithe is the Lord's and offerings are an expression of love and worship. But note the emphasis on this the amount is not what impresses Jesus but the attitude is what impresses Him. When we give the Lord loves it when there is an element of sacrifice and worship.

At the end of 2 Samuel there is a powerful story.

A plague had just swept through Israel and people were dying everywhere. David the man with a heart after God is led of the Spirit to build an altar to the Lord and to make sacrifices on it. He sees some land owned by a man called Orman, a Jebusite and perceives this to be the best place to make the alter and sacrifices and so he goes up to Orman and tells him what his plans are and offers to buy that piece of land off him. Orman basically says. David this is such a good idea, you should do it, hey, just take the land it's yours for free. Now while those words are often music to my ears 'it's free' they weren't to David's. David's response was to say to Orman, I will pay full price for the land because I will not give to the Lord that which costs me

nothing. Wow, this worshipper says I can't give to the Lord something I got for free, that's not worship, I will pay you full price. It has to cost me something. It's the same principle that Jesus is admiring in this woman.

Winston Churchill once said **"We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give."**

And I think that principle applies to every area of our lives.

***5Some people were talking about the beautiful stones used to build the temple and about the gifts that had been placed in it. Jesus said, 6"Do you see these stones? The time is coming when not one of them will be left in place. They will all be knocked down."***

We mentioned last week that this prophecy was fulfilled just 38 years after Jesus said these words. When Titus conquered Jerusalem he gave instructions to his Roman army not to touch the temple. Josephus the historian says that there was a soldier who was totally drunk carrying a torch and while torching houses around the city threw a torch into the temple against General Titus' instructions. The heat from the resulting fire was so intense that all gold on the ceilings and walls melted and ran into the cracks between these huge stones. The next day there was a gold hunting frenzy amongst the Roman soldiers. Every single stone some of them 48 feet long and 18 feet thick and 10 feet high were all dislodged in order to get the gold. Not one stone was left in place just as Jesus had said on this day.

Now as we turn to these next verses about prophecy and signs of the end times it is critical that we read this in context. The disciples are going to ask Jesus when all this will happen and Jesus is going to give signs that is for the Jewish people who are asking him. So please keep that in mind as we read. Some folk would use this passage to say that Christians would go through the tribulation but that is not at all what it is saying. Parallel accounts of what Jesus says here include the instructions to pray that this would not happen on the Sabbath because no one drives on the Sabbath or lights fires or works etc.

It's interesting that Luke writes that the Jews always ask for a sign and that is certainly what they are doing here.

***7Some people asked, "Teacher, when will all this happen? How can we know when these things are about to take place?"***

***8Jesus replied:***

***Don't be fooled by those who will come and claim to be me. They will say, "I am Christ!" and "Now is the time!" But don't follow them.***

Jesus said one sign that the end was coming would be that people would claim to be Christ, literal translation is deity or God.

**Now there are two things in this life that you can be absolutely certain of is that there is a God and you are not Him.**

Who would have thought that there would ever be an age when people considered themselves to be God and that that would be popular? It's madness. It's ridiculous.

I think it was about thirty years ago that Shirley MacLaine popularised a teaching that has been foundational to new age teaching and the spiritualist church cult and often referred to in witchcraft. Shirley in her wisdom wrote a book saying to people to wake up each day and look in a mirror and say to the image of god in the mirror, I am God, I am God I am God. Stand on a beach and declare to the waves she taught I am God. The divine spark is in all of us she taught. And people bought into it and now there are so many people who say I am Deity, I am God. Nuts! This is a common sign in our age now. When you hear people say I am god, Jesus says to us 'don't follow' the nutters.

***9When you hear about wars and riots, don't be afraid. These things will have to happen first, but that***

*isn't the end.*

**10 Nations will go to war against one another, and kingdoms will attack each other. 11 There will be great earthquakes, and in many places people will starve to death and suffer terrible diseases.**

Interesting this phrase “terrible diseases”. In the Greek it suggests diseases will arise in the last days that no one can find a cure for. I think the AIDS virus would fit into this category.

**All sorts of frightening things will be seen in the sky.**

**12 Before all this happens, you will be arrested and punished. You will be tried in your meeting places and put in jail. Because of me you will be placed on trial before kings and governors. 13 But this will be your chance to tell about your faith.**

Before the end Jesus is saying to his disciples that they are going to be opposed and persecuted and dragged before governors. And that is exactly what happened. Christians got tried before Agrippa and Caesar Nero and when they did, especially the apostle Paul they preached sermons. There was a huge opportunity to witness and they found that God put the words in their mouths and boldness in their hearts. Did Christians get put in jail and lose their jobs and get tortured and tried before authorities and get put to death in their hundreds of thousands. In fact after the first wave of persecution by Caesar Nero who was completely mad (like Shirley MacLaine) there were 9 further waves of persecution in the first 250 years of the early church and over 6 million Christians were to be thrown to lions or boiled alive or to be drowned in hot wax.

**14 Don't worry about what you will say to defend yourselves. 15 I will give you the wisdom to know what to say. None of your enemies will be able to oppose you or to say that you are wrong. 16 You will be betrayed by your own parents, brothers, family, and friends. Some of you will even be killed. 17 Because of me, you will be hated by everyone. 18 But don't worry! 19 You will be saved by being faithful to me.**

Cricky, you will be put on trial, imprisoned, hauled before governors, betrayed by your friends and family, hated by everyone, but don't worry, you will be saved.

Excuse me, don't worry??

The Lord is saying that even though you might lose your job or your freedom or your family or your life you cannot lose your salvation if you remain faithful to Him. Don't stress about those little things like torture, and prison, and betrayal and death because you are going to heaven. Look at the big picture.

When you and I get to heaven we are not going to be concerned about what we lost or what we suffered for Christ here on earth. You might lose your boyfriend because he doesn't believe in the Lord, you might give up your job because you cannot be dishonest in your business dealings, you may lose your freedom or even your physical life but that's nothing because you are going to live for eternity.

**20 When you see Jerusalem surrounded by soldiers, you will know that it will soon be destroyed. 21 If you are living in Judea at that time, run to the mountains. If you are in the city, leave it. And if you are out in the country, don't go back into the city. 22 This time of punishment is what is written about in the Scriptures. 23 It will be an awful time for women who are expecting babies or nursing young children! Everywhere in the land people will suffer horribly and be punished. 24 Some of them will be killed by swords. Others will be carried off to foreign countries. Jerusalem will be overrun by foreign nations until their time comes to an end.**

Jerusalem will be overrun by foreign nations until their time; the time of the gentiles has come to an end. When Titus and his troops wiped out over a million 100,000 Jews at the capture of Jerusalem some were taken into captivity to foreign lands and the rest that survived were scattered without a home or any sense of national identity around the globe. Gentiles, or non Jews, ran Jerusalem it was the time of the gentiles until May the 14<sup>th</sup> 1948 when Israel became a nation again. In the 1967 10 day war the Jews regained control of Jerusalem and the time of the gentiles was over.

Interesting to you students of bible prophecy, when this event took place every event that needed to precede the rapture and the return of Christ according to biblical prophecy had at this point been fulfilled. The rapture could have happened on the next day and now 44 years later it still hasn't happened but it could any day and any time. We are living in prophetic overtime. But when a day is as a thousand years to the Lord you could say he appears to be just a minute or two late.

***25Strange things will happen to the sun, moon, and stars. The nations on earth will be afraid of the roaring sea and tides, and they won't know what to do.***

A sign of the beginning of the end will be bizarre weather patterns and the sea is going to become such a problem that the nations will not know what to do. Does that sound like Tsunami's and government perceptions of global warming to you?

***26People will be so frightened that they will faint because of what is happening to the world. Every power in the sky will be shaken. 27Then the Son of Man will be seen, coming in a cloud with great power and glory. 28When all of this starts happening, stand up straight and be brave. You will soon be set free.***

At the second coming of Christ, Christ will be seen on earth ruling and reigning from Jerusalem. At the rapture Jesus snatches up Christians to be with Him in the clouds.

What should you and I do friends when we see bizarre weather patterns and people talk about global warming, when all these signs start happening?

I believe we should look up. Be ready. Live well and wisely every day but with the knowledge that this day could be the full body of believers represented in the book of Revelation by the 12 fathers of the OT and the 12 fathers of the NT will be with Him in heaven. This day could be the day? But don't look down or waste time worrying. Look up. Be worshipful. Be expectant. Stand straight. Be brave. You will soon be free. You will soon be with Him.

This is the third reference to the rapture in Luke's account. Luke 12:35-46 as we saw, then Luke 17:30-37 all point to the same event.

As we have seen in previous studies the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel in much the same way as the silver fern has become a symbol of this nation.

***29Then Jesus told them a story:***

***When you see a fig tree or any other tree 30putting out leaves, you know that summer will soon come. 31So, when you see these things happening, you know that God's kingdom will soon be here. 32You can be sure that some of the people of this generation will still be alive when all of this takes place. 33The sky and the earth won't last forever, but my words will.***

When you see a fig tree/ Israel or any other nation putting out leaves that is blossoming as a nation, coming to that place of real national identity. When you see this happen to Israel and to other nations as is happening right now with all the civil wars in the Middle East, when you see this happen some of this generation (a biblical generation being 100 years) will still be alive when Jesus appears in the clouds. So what should people do if they are alive when Israel gets its national identity back and other nations begin to follow suit?

***34Don't spend all of your time thinking about eating or drinking or worrying about life. If you do, the final day will suddenly catch you 35like a trap. That day will surprise everyone on earth.***

If you are alive in this final day and age don't get snowed down with eating and cafe's and fashion, business and worry and all the stuff of life. Be alert. Keep looking up. Keep the big picture. Focus on things that are eternal.

***36 Watch out and keep praying that you can escape all that is going to happen and that the Son of Man will be pleased with you.***

Pray that you can escape the days of judgement that are about to happen in the end times. You and I best know this period as the 7 years of tribulation where the unbelieving world will be judged and get the opportunity to repent.

An obvious question to ask those that say that Christians will go through the Tribulation is this. If it is our destiny to go through the tribulation why then would Jesus tell end time believers to pray that they would escape the tribulation?

The issue for me and you is not do Christians go through the tribulation or not. The real issue is that we pray and have a real relationship with the Lord, that we keep that relationship healthy so that when believers are raptured we too will go with them.

***37 Jesus taught in the temple each day, and he spent each night on the Mount of Olives. 38 Everyone got up early and came to the temple to hear him teach.***

Everyone got up early to hear Him. That last sentence challenges me. I hear the Lord's voice Ok during the day but everyone got up early to hear Him.

Do I want to hear His voice more? Jesus got up early to spend time with the Father every day. If you or I desire to hear his voice more, I suggest to you that this is a behaviour that wise Christians have used forever. Hungering for His voice? Then here is a closing word for us.

I thank God that in these days, you and I don't need to worry or get bogged down with the stuff of life. Let's look up. Stand straight. Be bold. The Lord has blessed us with the big picture, so don't sweat the small stuff. Keep your relationship with Him real and your first priority and get ready for heaven.