

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bible to Luke 21:5. In this chapter, Jesus was only a few days from the crucifixion. On these last days before the cross, He shared many profound truths with His disciples. Luke 21 is a prophetic section in which Jesus speaks about the future. So today, we are going to go Back to the Future.

Jesus didn't need a DeLorean to travel through time. He was God in the flesh. In Luke 21, He looked forward into the future and told us what will happen. So, let's go Back to the Future as we read starting in Luke 21:5:

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "as for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another, every one of them will be thrown down." "Teacher," they asked, "When will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" He replied, "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilence in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will save yourselves.

When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

This is a two-part message, so we'll stop here and finish the chapter next week. However, look down at verse 26. Jesus knew during the last days, there would be a great deal of fear and pressure. He said, "Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world."

In the 21st century, the word "terror" has taken on a new meaning. Only five years ago, in 1998, if I had told you in five years terrorism would become our #1 fear, I would have been labeled a doomsday prophet. Because of what happened on September 11, 2001, we now live in a different world where "Homeland Security" and "terror alert level" is a part of our daily lives. People are

living in fear of what is going to happen in this world. Let's go back to the future to study what Jesus said would happen. Buckle your seat belts because we are going to be traveling faster than the speed of light, we're going to travel at the speed of thought! Our first stop is:

I. 33 A.D. THE AMAZING PREDICTIONS OF JESUS

Jesus made several radical predictions about the near and distant future when He was speaking to His disciples in the spring of His 33rd year. Many of His predictions have already occurred, and we can verify them historically. Consider four of His predictions that have already happened:

1. (40-300 A.D.) The followers of Jesus *were* persecuted

Jesus warned the disciples the time would soon come when the disciples would undergo terrible persecution. Jesus had twelve core disciples, and Judas committed suicide. Church history tells us of the eleven remaining disciples, ten died horrible deaths as martyrs for Christ. For the first three hundred years of the Christian faith, thousands of believers were massacred because they refused to say "Kaiser estin Kurios." (Caesar is Lord) Among the first to die was Stephen, who was stoned to death because he preached the resurrection of Jesus. As they were killing him, he prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Tradition tells us Simon Peter begged to be crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified in the same manner in which Jesus was crucified. Polycarp, the pastor at the church at Smyrna, (in modern day Turkey) was arrested and tried when he was 86 years old. He was tied to the stake to be burned. When he was given one final chance to curse Jesus, he replied, "Eighty six years I have served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Then they lit the fire and eyewitnesses reported the flames were blown away from his body, so the commanding soldier had him killed with the sword.

The Roman Emperor Nero hated Christians. He ordered thousands of them to be thrown to the lions. Nero sometimes took Christians from the dungeons, and dipped them in tar. Then they were tied to trees in his gardens and lit on fire to illuminate his gardens as he rode his horse at night. But the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. As people watched how these Christians died, with faith in Jesus, thousands others stepped up to take their place.

2. (70 A.D.) The temple *was* destroyed

The disciples marveled at the beauty of the temple and the size of the huge stones in the walls. The temple in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus was the second temple (Solomon's Temple was first). This second temple was built by the Jews who returned from exile, but it had been extensively renovated by Herod the Great, so it was often called Herod's temple. Josephus described it's beauty: "The outward face of the temple was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the suns' own rays." (*The Wars of the Jews*, book 5, section5)

As the disciples admired the temple Jesus said the time would come when Jerusalem would be surrounded and thousands of people would die. History records this happened in 70 A.D. The Roman general Titus laid siege to the city and there was widespread starvation and death. Josephus estimated over 100,000 people died in this battle. In verse 22 Jesus called this the “time of punishment” for Jerusalem.

3. (73–163 A.D.) The Jews *were* scattered

In verse 24 Jesus predicted the Israelites would be taken prisoner to all the nations. The Jews continued to rebel against Rome until the final rebellion of Bar Kockba in 163 A.D. By this time almost all the Jews had been killed or deported to other nations. Josephus claims 97,000 Jews were taken captive and relocated to other countries. History calls this “the diaspora” which means “the dispersal” or “scattering.” For almost 1,800 years there was no nation of Israel and the Jews had no homeland. But there were Jewish pockets of culture that cropped up in Egypt, Asia, Europe, and later in the New World. The important thing about this “scattering” is that God promised He would bring His people *back* into the land of their forefathers.

4. (1967) The “Times of the Gentiles” *were* completed

In verse 24 Jesus predicted Jerusalem would be “trampled on by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Let me give you a quick history lesson about the Gentiles who controlled Jerusalem for almost 1,800 years: From 70 A.D. until about 637 the Romans controlled Jerusalem, the last 300 years is called the Byzantine period because of the influence of the Greek Orthodox faith based in Constantinople—by the way, they were Gentiles.

In 637 A.D. the Muslim Arab armies attacked Jerusalem and took control. They were Gentiles. Jerusalem was under Muslim control until the Crusaders from Europe came to “liberate” the Holy sites. Beginning in 1099 for about 200 years the Christian Crusaders had a tenuous control of Jerusalem—they were Gentiles.

In 1244, the Egyptian Muslims called the Mamluks pushed the last of the Crusaders back toward Europe. Then in 1517, the Ottoman Turks controlled the city. It wasn’t until 1917, near the end of WWI that the Turks lost control of Jerusalem. The movie, *Lawrence of Arabia*, was set in this time period. As the British forces were getting ready to advance on Jerusalem, General Allenby sent three bi-planes, called Sopwith Camels flying over the city. From these airplanes they dropped thousands of leaflets that read in Arabic, “Surrender Jerusalem immediately.” General Allenby signed his last name only on the leaflets, “Allenby.” The Muslims, who had never seen an airplane before thought the name on the leaflets read, “Allah bay” which means “servant of Allah.” They must have thought the message was from Allah because they surrendered Jerusalem to the British without a shot being fired! Because of the airplanes, some people have called attention to Isaiah 31:5, “Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will pass over Jerusalem and rescue it.”

For thirty years, the British controlled Jerusalem—they were Gentiles. During the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, thousands of the Jews scattered around the globe started returning to the Holy Land. The British left in 1948 when Israel became a nation (which

we’ll talk about next week), but none of the old city was under Jewish occupation. Jerusalem was part of the West Bank under Jordanian control (although the residents of Jerusalem called themselves Palestinians)—they were Gentiles.

But on June 7, 1967, during the 6 Day War, Israel gained control of Jerusalem for the first time in almost 1,800 years! Do you know the very first thing the Jews did? The soldiers went immediately to the Western Wall of the Temple, and began to weep and pray. That’s why many people call it the wailing wall. For those of us who were alive in 1967, prophecy was fulfilled in our lifetime! The Jews returned to Jerusalem, and by the way, they *aren’t* Gentiles.

Moshe Katz was living near Jerusalem in 1967. Today he is 67 years old and he writes about what happened that day:

“It was the middle of the Six Day War. I was a policeman, and I was working the night shift that week. I was in shul praying when somebody came in and brought the news that our soldiers were near Jerusalem. You could sense excitement as people became informed. When I heard the news that our soldiers had captured Jerusalem, I prayed and gave thanks. We knew that we were living through a very important day in our people’s history.”

A few days later, Moshe visited the Western Wall and he remembers: “I saw the Wall for the first time in my life, and I wept for joy. My wife tells me that I kept repeating, ‘We have done it, Baruch Hashem, we have done it!’”

TRANSITION: When Jesus made these predictions in 33 A.D., they were all to take place in the future. We can travel back into history and confirm these events occurred exactly as Jesus predicted. But you may be asking, “So what? What does it mean to me?” Okay, enough of the past, let’s return to the present day.

II. 2003 THE ASSURING PROMISE OF JESUS

Next week we’ll talk about the rest of chapter 21. We’ll examine the signs Jesus said would appear before His return and the end of the world. In spite of all the things that happened, and are *going* to happen, Jesus made an amazing promise to His followers in verse 18. He said, “But not a hair of your head will perish.” You may challenge that promise since thousands of Christians were fed to lions, burned at the stake, and crucified. It’s true—they died, but the key is the word “perish.” That word is *apolousai* when means to be “destroyed with no means of recovery.” It’s the same word Jesus used when He said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one-and-only son; that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Thousands have died for Jesus, but not a hair of their head perished. Because of this promise, Jesus tells us three attitudes we ought to have:

(1) Don’t be afraid!

In verse 9 Jesus said, “When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened.” The prophetic passages of the Bible aren’t intended to frighten you—but to encourage you. Jesus

predicted the time would come when people's hearts would fail them from fear. That sounds like today. First there was Enron then World Com. United Airlines is in chapter 11 and American Airlines is on the brink of bankruptcy. Or soldiers are in Iraq and Afghanistan, and North Korea has plans to build a nuclear weapon. There's SARS, AIDS, WMD's and other initials just as scary.

Jesus didn't say it once, He repeated it frequently: "Do not be afraid. Be of good cheer! Do not let your heart be troubled." He has promised not a hair of your head will perish. Hair must be pretty important to God because this is the second statement Jesus made about hair. In Luke 12:7 He indicated God is so interested in your life that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." His next words were: "Do not be afraid." Think about it, a single strand of hair is perhaps the smallest visible unit of your body parts, yet it contains your entire genetic code. God knew long before we discovered DNA. Jesus is saying, "If God is going to take care of the small things like one strand of hair, He'll take care of the bigger things too."

So the next time you hear a believer moaning about how frightened they are, just walk over to them and pluck out a strand of their hair and give it them. Say, "Hair, God's gonna take care of you!" What if the person is a bald man? Try looking in his ear!

Don't be afraid! You don't need self-confidence, you need God confidence. Jesus said, "in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33)

(2) Decide not to worry! (14)

When Jesus spoke about facing persecution, He gave some powerful advice that applies to every difficult situation. In verse 14 He said, "Make up your mind not to worry beforehand." He wasn't just flippantly saying, "Don't worry. Be happy!" He said you must decide in advance you aren't going to worry.

Most Americans believe there will be another terrorist attack on our citizens that will be as bad as 9/11. But it does no good to worry about it. Worry is a sin. The Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing, but pray about everything." (Philippians 4:6) Instead of worrying about what might happen, pray God will give you strength to deal with whatever happens. And even if there is another 9/11 type attack, make up your mind beforehand that you aren't going to worry about it if it *does* happen.

I love the little poem about two birds observing human behavior: Said the robin to the sparrow, "I'd really like to know / Why these anxious human creatures rush about and worry so." / Said the sparrow to the robin, "I think that it must be / That they have not a heavenly Father such as cares for you and me." Jesus said, "Don't worry! If God takes care of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, He'll take care of you!"

(3) Stand firm in your faith! (19)

Difficult days provide us with a golden opportunity to demonstrate faith to people whose hearts are fainting with fear. In fact, Jesus said in verse 13, "This will result in you being witnesses to

them.” In order to do that, we must do what Jesus said in verse 19, we must stand firm. In a time when this old world is shaking, rattling, and rolling, we must stand firm in our faith. And when we do, the world will take notice. They will want to know why we aren’t worrying, or why we aren’t afraid. And we can tell them it’s because of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Many of the ancient Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics, taught that like a wheel, history repeats itself. Some said each cycle lasted 3,000 years. They really believed “What goes around comes around.” But the Bible doesn’t teach History is like a circle. The Bible teaches all of history is moving in a linear direction toward one final cataclysmic event. Don’t you have a sense deep down inside that something BIG is going to happen? It is.

When Cindy and I were serving in Alabama, a large church in California flew us out to talk to us about coming to serve as their pastor. As we toured the Southern California area, we were impressed with the climate and the beauty. But everyone there is aware they live on a huge geological fault line—the San Andreas Fault. They’ve learned to live with the occasional tremors and minor earthquakes. But the folks who have lived there for many years all seem to agree the “big ‘un” is going to come sometime. They live with the thought that at any moment a super-earthquake could strike and cause more damage and death than ever before. They live with the expectation of the “Big un.” By the way, the church really wanted us to come, but after praying about it, we didn’t feel God leading us there—it wasn’t God’s fault—it was probably the San Andreas’ Fault!

Even those who aren’t followers of Jesus believe something *big* is going to happen. We’ve lived through the minor tremors of terrorist attacks and wars, but don’t you sense “the Big ‘Un” is coming? If you feel that way, you are exactly correct. The events of this world are not happening by chance. History shows us the story of mankind is His-story. Something big is going to happen—but the “big un” is not an earthquake—it is the return of Jesus Christ. He *is* going to return to planet earth. You can bet your bottom dollar on it, you can wager you life, your soul, and your eternity on that fact.

So, my friend, whatever happens, Jesus has promised not one strand of your hair will perish, so don’t be afraid, decide in advance not to worry; and say, “I’m going to stand firm in my faith, even if everything around me is crumbling to pieces.” When He comes, will you be found standing firm?

Yes, we’re facing some tough times in the 21st century, but we need to remember fearful people actually seek God during tough times. The largest attendance in the history of our church was last Sunday; the second largest attendance was Easter a year ago. The third largest attendance was the Sunday after 9/11. The message we must shout during these days of confusion and fear is “There is hope in Jesus. But Jesus is our only hope!”

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and His righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ the solid Rock I stand; all other

ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand. (from the hymn “The Solid Rock” by Edward Mote,)

OUTLINE

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3. (73–163 A.D.) The Jews were scattered
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"Not a hair of your head will perish..."

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2. Decide not to worry! (14)
3. Stand firm in your faith! (19)



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes