Stand firm

Luke 21:5-19

Key Verse 21:19

“**Stand firm, and you will win life”**

We all want to know what will happen in the future. Why do we want to know what will happen in the future? It is because we want to live a life of peace and safety. No one wants to live a life of fear and anxiety and worries. But when we do not know what will happen in the future we suffer from fear and anxiety. So we all want to know what will happen in the future and we want to build up our future security. In today’s passage Jesus teaches us what will happen in the future and how we should respond to those things. My message has two parts.

Part I. The end will not come right away. (Lk 21:5-11)

Part II. You will bear testimony to me (Lk 21:12-19)

**Part I. The end will not come right away. (Lk 21:5-11)**

Look at verses 5-9.

**5Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6“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.” 7“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” 8He 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. 9When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”**

Today’s passage starts with remarking of some of Jesus’ disciples about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. The temple they were looking at was indeed beautiful and magnificent. Herod was building it in 46 years. So you can imagine it is a beautiful building. Sometimes we are amazed by such beautiful buildings. We have even 7 miraculous buildings in the world. And we are all amazed. But it is true that there will be times when all of these beautiful buildings will fall to the ground, and not one stone will be left on another.

Jesus said, **6“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.”** To Jesus’ disciples the complete destruction of the temple means the end of the world. They could not imagine that God would allow such things to happen. But what Jesus said happened in AD 70 when Roman armies destroyed Herod’s temple. In the past, the destruction of their temple build by Solomon was done by Babylonian army.

So even the temple of the only true God was not saved. The Lord God allowed his temple to be destroyed. In John’s gospel, Jesus referred himself as the true temple, and indeed physical temple is not the real temple. The real temple is Jesus Christ through whom we can meet God and worship him anytime and anywhere.

But still to Jesus’ disciples to hear the complete destruction of the temple was very shocking. So they asked the questions, **7“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?”**

Then Jesus answered, ‘**8He 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. 9When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”**

The first sign will be the coming of false Messiah’s. Many will come in Jesus name, claiming “I am he” and ‘The time is near.” But Jesus said ‘do not follow them.’ How can we distinguish between false Messiah’s and true Messiah? The true Messiah will come after the coming of the many false Messiahs. Even in our days we have many false Messiah who claim to be Messiahs let alone all kinds of pleasures that gives us temporary relief from the pain of our lives.

Sometimes we seek extreme measure of pleasure and joy not from Christ but from something else. They can be alcohol, drugs, porno, gambling, and all kinds of sinful and unhealthy habits. But they do not deliver us from our fear and anxieties and pains of our life. After indulging them we feel more terrible.

When we do not do what is right or what we should do nothing can give us peace. We have peace when we do what is right. Indeed there are many false Messiah’s, humans and things that promise the deliverance from our fear and anxiety and worries and troubles. And we approach the end of our days they will increase all the more. So Jesus said, “‘**8He 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.**

Jesus also taught them another sign, it is ‘wars and uprising’. **9When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened.** Uprising means ‘rebellion’ or ‘breaking or denying established system.’ When we hear of ‘wars’ and ‘uprising’ it is our natural response to be fearful. I still remember when I first heard about ISIS and their brutal murdering of innocent people. I was fearful and I feared that the whole world would live under the threat of such terrible people. Indeed we are under their threat. But Jesus said, “Do not be frightened.”

What is happening among us such as terrorists’ attack and many things may be the sign of the end of the age. And Jesus’ message is ‘do not be frightened.’ His another messages is ,” **These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”**

Some people misunderstood those signs and thought that the end will come right away, and they quit their jobs and stop doing everything but just waited to be lifted up. They all showed that they were in great mistake.

Jesus said ‘those things, such as coming of false Messiahs and wars and uprisings’ must happen. Why did he say these things must happen first? I think they are signs of man’s fallen nature. Mankind has many defects and defects will be shown as we follow false Messiahs. We are responsible for wars and uprisings because of our shortcomings and we become frightened.

Jesus’ conclusion is ‘these things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.’ What is there more than other than coming of false Messiahs, and wars and uprisings?

Look at verses 10-11.

**10Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.**

Wars and uprising Jesus mentioned above may be related to small scale of conflict. But ‘nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom’ could refer to grand scale of conflicts. It means nations and kingdoms will seek their own interests more intensely. So far America has role as defender of free world. But we may seek our interests more rather than the interests of other nations and kingdoms.

Jesus mentioned about another sign, that is natural disaster on earth and heaven. **11There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.**

Natural disaster on earth is earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. We cannot control earthquakes. We try to find out early warning in advance but that is as far as we can go. We cannot be free from earthquakes, especially ‘great one’. Even in living in Los Angeles, we don’t know when we will have big one. We don’t know about earthquake enough to keep our safety. Basically we live under the mercy of God. Famines and pestilence is the same. We cannot control weather condition which is important part of famines. Last year was the hottest year of the whole earth after the time we began to measure our temperature on earth. We expected a lot of El Nino last year but southern California did not have it but northern had it. We may be responsible for the global warming. There are various virus and diseases which can spread and we have no control over it. Many times, we respond only after it breaks out.

From heaven Jesus was talking about ‘fearful events and great signs.’ Fearful events can be something like colliding of some heavenly bodies on earth or black hole, or something else.

But the natural disaster on earth and heaven is the end. There is more.

**Part II. You will bear testimony to me (Lk 21:12-19)**

Look at verses 12-19.

**12“But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13And so you will bear testimony to me. 14But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. 16You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.17Everyone will hate you because of me. 18But not a hair of your head will perish.19Stand firm, and you will win life.**

How do we call these verses in one sentence? It is ‘persecution.’ This is for believers. Verse 12 says,**“But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.”**

The persecution against believers all on account of Jesus’ name is the main sign from Jesus point of view.

Mysteriously, the persecution against believers will bring opportunity for testifying about Jesus. **13And so you will bear testimony to me.**

In the course of persecution against believers, the believers will have opportunity to bear their testimony to Jesus. The time of persecution in fact is the best time where believers can testify about Jesus Christ.

As I remember ‘one of John Wesley’s daily spiritual maintenance’ is ‘when was the last time I witness about Jesus.

So Jesus reveals there is evil forces working the behind the signs of the end of the age. And the very evidence of evil forces working behind scene is revealed in their persecution against believers. They will be imprisoned and they would be tried before kings and governors. It happened to Jesus. It happened to apostle Paul. It will happen to all believers.

Jesus said in **John 15:18-20**

**18“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”**

That is why Jesus said their persecution is ‘all on account of my name.’ Believers will be persecuted all because of Jesus’ name.

But Jesus helped his people not to worry about how to defend themselves. Look at verses 14-15.

“**14But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”**

This is the promise of Jesus that he will defend his people. He will put his words on their lips and they will have words and wisdom that none of their adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

This is what we have seen as we studied Luke’s gospel. Religious leaders who tried to persecute Jesus could not resist or contradict because of Jesus’ wisdom and words. For example, ‘give to Caesar what is Caesar’s; to God what is God’s.’ ‘For God is not the God of the dead but of the living.’ “If anyone is without sin let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

And he will give words and wisdom for his people who will be persecuted. Jesus will identify himself with them. So when Saul was going to Damascus to persecute believers the risen Jesus appeared to Saul and said, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Jesus revealed the persecution at the end of the times will be very severe. Look at verses 16-17. “**16You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.17Everyone will hate you because of me.”**

Have you betrayed? Or have you felt that you have been betrayed? Betrayal is terrible thing to experience. But Jesus said his people will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. It means they will use their intimate knowledge of you against you. And some of believers will die because of their betrayal. And Jesus even said, “Everyone will hate you because of me.” The word ‘hate’ is strong word. And the word ‘everyone’ is also strong word. But it is all because of Jesus. It is not because of themselves, believers. It is all because of Jesus.

It is like a soccer player. When a player gets a ball all other players pay attention to him. All other opponents attack him not because of him but because of the ball. Believers are persecuted not because of themselves but because of Jesus. That is why Jesus said, ‘everyone will hate you because of me.’

And everyone includes superficial believers. Persecution from inside of a church, from superficial believers, or our own believing brothers and sisters with good intentions, can be very challenging. As Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” The religious leaders believed in God but they persecuted Jesus.

When these things happen to us what will be our response? When we are betrayed and when everyone will hate us, what can be our response? Our natural response would be losing our heart and stop working for the Lord.

But Jesus asked his people to stand firm.

Jesus has a promise for his people. **18But not a hair of your head will perish.19Stand firm, and you will win life.**

Not a hair of believers will perish without God’s approval.

**Luke 12:4-7**

**4“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.**

Jesus final word of encouragement is ‘stand firm and you will win life.” Stand firm does not mean doing nothing.

**1 Corinthians 15:58 “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”**

It means to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

In conclusion, many things will happen in the future without our control. They are comings of false Messiahs, temptations, wars and conflicts among nations, natural disasters, and persecutions for believers. Persecutions can come from close people for believers, their family members, and even their church coworkers. When these things happen our natural response is to lose heart and give up witnessing about Jesus. But Jesus asked his people to stand firm, promising defense, protection and life, reward.

One word: Stand firm