

THE KING IS COMING
LUKE 21:5-38

The end of the story! 30 sermons later! 16 Discovery Group meetings and over 100 discussion questions later, we come today to the end of our study in Luke's gospel. It is not quite the end of the story because we did that at Easter; the story Luke tells ends with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the glory and joy of Easter. We come to the end of our journey through Luke with the last chapter we have to consider, chapter 21, which strangely is also about how a story ends. The story that Luke tells has not yet ended; his story went on into volume 2, the book of Acts where he tells the stories of the good news being preached and spreading throughout the world; the story still goes on, as the gospel is still preached, as the stories of Jesus are still told and people like us become part of the story by faith in Jesus. I hope you have enjoyed our journey through Luke; I hope you have learned something from it; I hope your faith is a bit stronger as a result.

"The end is nigh!" I don't know if you've seen people carrying placards that declare this warning as it refers to the world; you might also have come across people who will tell you that on such and such a day the world will come to an end. They make these predictions and they confidently tell us that this will happen. I wonder if they feel any kind of embarrassment when it doesn't happen. People then will laugh at these predictions and shake their heads sadly when anyone begins to talk about "the end of the world". Alongside that, as Christians we live in world where lots of bad things happen – the world is full of suffering and pain, some of it inflicted by natural disasters, earthquakes, floods and the like, some of it inflicted by people on each other, wars and violence and there never seems to be an end to this and we wonder how to cope with it all.

Then we read the word 'hope' in the Bible. How do we react? Well, sometimes we laugh because the very last thing that seems to be around our world is a sense of hope. There is much more of a sense of helplessness, people being resigned to these hard things as if we can do nothing to change the world. 'Hope' is the last quality people seem to have. All the hopes we've had that people can get better and improve the world are dashed. But the Bible's sense of hope does not come from any kind of confidence that people can improve; the Bible's sense of hope comes from promises that Jesus has made and promises that God still has to complete. Hope is a precious quality, but a quality that Christians should have and that we can pass on to others; God has done great things for us in Jesus and so we have hope; God has promised great things to us in Jesus and so we have hope. We need to keep hold of that hope, no matter what!

Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem; it was the last week of His life; they were looking around the city and reacting to the grand Temple buildings in way that any tourists might do! "Wow; look at these wonderful buildings; look how ornate they are; look at way they are decorated!" Some of the stones were huge; the temple was full of gold and there was a lot about it to admire; we've all seen buildings like it and we've all done it! But Jesus changes the tone: "*a time...*" (21:6) He clearly talks of a time when the Temple they are admiring will be destroyed, when there will be no stone left on another and the conversation turns to things yet to come. Both Matthew and Mark have similar chapters in their gospels, where they report this conversation. It is complicated because there are three strands interwoven here and sometimes it is hard to see which strand is which and what goes with which piece. Jesus says three things: 1) Jerusalem will be destroyed; 2) Jesus will come again; 3) till then here is the world in which we live. This is not all about the end of the age, but is about all three of these things together.

1) Jerusalem will be destroyed that's where the conversation starts: *"the time..."* (21:6) *"when you..."* (21:20) There will come a time when the city will be surrounded by its enemies and will be destroyed and that will be a terrible time for the people of Jerusalem, they will flee to the mountains for safety. The city will be trampled on and destroyed and all the wonderful and ornate buildings will come crashing down. All the glory and splendour of Jerusalem will be gone as result of this cataclysmic event. The history books tell us that in AD70, the Roman army led by a general called Titus surrounded Jerusalem and laid siege to the city and then entered it bit by bit to destroy its fortifications and the temple just as Jesus said. This was clearly seen as time of judgement on Israel, a day when the Jews would weep; all that symbolised their glory and power, the city which they treasured, the symbol of the presence of God with His people – all of that comes crashing down and a light will go out for them. When the city was rebuilt, it was a pagan city. The sign of the end of Jerusalem will be seeing armies round city.

2) Jesus will come again – somewhere along way in this conversation the notion of the end of the age has been mentioned. Jesus makes a promise that has caused so many people to have hope, yet has also been the cause so many problems and of so much speculation ever since. *"At that..."* (21:27) He will come again; 'the Son of Man' is Jesus' favourite way of talking about Himself and He talks about coming in a very different way from His first coming. This time He will come in glory and power; it will be an event that the whole world will see; it will be an event that will have an impact on all creation, hence the sun, moon and stars. It will be an event that will complete the work Jesus has begun – *"When these..."* (21:28) While Jesus' work is finished and our salvation is complete, we are still flawed human beings; when Jesus comes, our redemption will be complete because we will become perfect people; all sin will be taken away, there will be no more suffering and pain, a new world will be created when Christ comes again. The sign of the end of the age – when we see Jesus in clouds of glory.

3) Till then, here is our world! – Jesus warns His disciples that the end of the age is not going to come quickly, but that they will have to live in a pretty hard world. 'This is world and these are kinds of things you will have to face as Christians!' *"When you..."* (21:9) *"Nation will..."* (21:10f) *"Before all..."* (21:12) This is a world that we recognise only too well; it is a world that is full of difficult things and a world in which faith is not always an easy thing; it is a world in which Christians are persecuted for their faith and betrayed. What stories have been in news headlines of late? We hear about thousands flooded in Myanmar; an earthquake in China; food riots in Egypt; I was also hearing recently of a Christian family from Pakistan who are coming to Scotland for a time because it is no longer safe for them to stay at home; there are young Christians at school whose friends make fun of them because they have Christian faith. This is the world we live in and the kind of world that Jesus predicted! He gives us this long list of signs of the age; we live in this world till the end of the story comes and the Son of Man appears in clouds of glory and in power!

What to do? How are we to react to the end of the age promise and to the signs of the age we live in? Jesus give us five things:

- *"do not be frightened"* (21:9) it is the easiest thing in the world to watch the news and hear these stories and develop a sense of fear; there are lots of people who are afraid to walk the streets at night, or to use the underpasses, or to open their doors to strangers and we are quite right to be careful about the way we live and we should be secure and safe. But God has not gone away; God has not abandoned the world; in the world in which Jesus died and was raised, evil will not have last word;

the promise of His coming again still stands and will stand forever; we have good reason still to have hope in our hearts.

- *“be witnesses” (21:13)* do you remember the build up to the Millennium, or the year 2000 anyway? There were groups, especially in the USA, who stocked up with supplies and retreated to the mountains to hide and wait for the end of the world. They took themselves away from the world and locked themselves away. There is a great temptation for us to do that, especially if we are being harassed for our faith, persecuted at school or work, to retreat into our shell. Yet, Jesus says that the world we live in is an opportunity for us to be witnesses, to live out our faith, to tell people about Jesus; we live by different values and standards, we have a story to tell that can change people from despair to hope. This is a time and place for us not to retreat into our Christian shell or some kind of Christian ghetto, but to be witnesses to people we know and meet who are not Christians that they might yet find faith and hope.
- *“Stand firm” (21:19)* Some misunderstood Jesus; they thought He had said He would come within a generation, that his coming was immediate. When He didn't come and that didn't happen as soon as that they began to drift away. Equally, under pressure, others gave up their faith; persecution was too hard for them, too costly, so they gave up faith. Stand firm in the faith; keep believing; faith is not something we do once and that's it done; faith is a habit that we live by every day; keep believing; keep holding onto faith; stand firm!
- *“watch” (21:36)* Jesus' coming will be unexpected; like a thief in night, like a trap; so we are to be careful about the way we live our lives, to live in the right kind of way; *“be careful...” (21:34)*
- *“Pray” (21:36)* for the world, for God to fulfil His promises, for ourselves to be able to do all of these other things; for God's grace to surround us and sustain us every day.

The story is not yet ended; the end has not yet come; the sign of the end of the age will be when we see Jesus in glory and power. That is our Christian hope and that is what Jesus promised; let nothing take that hope away from us at all; let nothing move us from that hope; then Jesus will bring in a new world and all sin and suffering, pain, tears, and death will be done away with and everything will be made new and we will be made perfect and complete. Till then we live in a hard world, a world where the news headlines are nearly always about hard things that happen, about suffering or violence, about pain or evil in world. Let this world not make us doubt God; let this world not make us frightened, or feel hopeless. Instead, let us be witnesses, tell the people you meet about Jesus, let hope shine out from our hearts and through our words; stand firm in your faith, not wavering, not giving up, because the Lord is faithful; watch and pray, live life well and keep living life well. The world is not spinning down to die and disappear; instead God is working out His purpose and one day Jesus will come again and His glory will fill whole earth; the King is coming; till that day let faith and hope live in our hearts.