

Title: Kingdom against Kingdom
Text: Luke 21.5-19
Theme: Taking Jesus seriously
Series: Luke
Aim: I aim to call my people to take Jesus seriously to be prepared and to protect their joy.

Read Text:

Luke became a follower of Christ in the early days of the church and ended up traveling with Paul on part of his church-planting trips. As a doctor, he may have helped take care of Paul. No one in Israel at that time needed evidence for the life of Christ, but that would change in one generation and it was a need for everyone outside of Israel. Luke was in a wonderful place to gather data and interview many to write a 2-volume account about Christ (Luke) and the early days of the church (Acts). He did this as he said (Luke 1.3-4) "to write and orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Luke has investigated the life of Christ and is giving a report of its accuracy.

There are people who do not believe that we actually landed on the moon back in 1969. About 3 months ago, I happened to be with a friend of mine, Pat Forrester who was an astronaut. He is now retired from NASA, but he was at one time, the chief astronaut for NASA and flew the space shuttle on three missions. I know him because he is an elder at a church where a friend of mine is the pastor. So, I asked Pat if he had ever talked with anyone who denied that we landed on the moon and what does he tell them. He said, I tell them that I was in NASA. I knew the men personally who went on the moon. I saw all of the work and the evidence myself. Besides, if the entire thing was a hoax designed to intimidate Russia, to pull off a hoax on that magnitude and scope would have taken way more sophistication, technology and competency than the moon landing itself. The moon landing demanded competency from NASA. The hoax demanded competency and secrecy from the entire Federal government, which, as we all know is not particularly competent at competency nor secrecy.

That is similar to the role that Luke had. He was not one of the 12 disciples, but he knew many of them. He traveled with them, he heard their stories, he talked with witnesses and he himself saw the growth and the influence of the gospel. Luke's gospel is now one of the pieces of evidence that support the fact that Jesus Christ actually came to this earth, lived, died, rose again and ascended back to heaven. Those who do not believe in the historicity of Jesus are not sophisticated intellectuals. They are ignorant and foolish. However, believing in the historicity of Jesus is one thing. But embracing the message of Christ is another. It is not a leap of faith to believe in the historical facts of Christ. But believing in the message of Christ goes counter to what we are inclined to believe. Jesus came to fulfill the prophecies that promised his coming. But his coming was more than an appearance, it was an invasion. Jesus came to plant a flag claiming to take back what rightfully belongs to him. He called it the kingdom of God. He was the king, and his kingdom would be comprised of people who would follow him and swear allegiance to him as their king. He made it clear that in the end, there will be no other kings and

no other kingdoms. But his kingdom is unlike any of the world's kingdoms. He is a king unlike all of the other kings and his kingdom has a value system that is different than all the others. This means those who follow him believe and live differently than citizens of the world's kingdoms.

It is Tuesday, April 4, AD 30, late in the afternoon. In a little more than 48 hours, Jesus is going to be arrested. 3 days from now, he will be dead. There is a lot about to happen. Jesus is going to die on a cross and be buried in a tomb. This is going to shock the disciples even though he has told them this again and again. The death of Christ is the most significant event in the history of this world. (Gospel) What is about to happen is nothing less than cataclysmic. Now, on the third day, Jesus rises again. This is obviously glorious, but it's not like, "Ok, where were we? Where's the next village to visit?" Because, Jesus is going to return to heaven. The disciples will be charged with advancing his message and kingdom by establishing churches. But this is not going to be easy. In fact, they are going to face serious opposition and they need to be ready. There is so much that is about to happen to these men. Jesus is going to die, resurrect, appear to them, ascend to heaven, send the Spirit, and launch the church. But there is more.

Jerusalem is going to fall. The Temple will be destroyed. Jesus is telling them about this. But there is more. The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem is a preview of the destruction of this world. But that is not the end of the story. Christ will return and take it all back and remake it. We read this account and we know that the disciples had no idea of the tsunami that was about to hit them. What was true about them, is true about us. This world is not a safe place and it will not go on like it has. The kingdoms of this world are in conflict with one another but ultimately in conflict with the real King. Therefore, following Jesus is hard. It puts you into conflict with the kingdoms of this world. That feels dangerous to be in opposition to the kingdoms and power structures of the world. However, the kingdoms of this world are always in conflict with one another. This world is not a safe place. So, while it is hard, for now to be a follower of Christ, it is the only eternally safe place. Your eternal life and your eternal satisfaction and joy are only safe in Christ.

For the next few weeks, we are going to be considering these hard words and glorious promises of Jesus. This is weighty and serious stuff. It is heavy and necessary to know and form our lives around. Everything is not fine. Everything is not ok in the world. We are sitting on a time bomb. I have talked with many of you who have gotten pathology reports from a doctor telling you that you have a malignancy in your body and you need to follow up with a specialist. So, you do, and you are told that the next available appointment is in 3 months. And you are like, "I could be dead by then!" You have plenty of opportunity for anxiety. Beloved, this is our world! Our world is an anxiety factory. There is so much to be fearful of. Jesus tells us that. "In the world, you will have tribulation." (John 16.33) There is no avoiding it. So, why don't we all go out and just get drunk, or high, or jump off the Mackinac Bridge? Because there is more than just the hard words. Jesus tells us the truth about the hard realities and he tells us the truth about his glorious promises so we can see the hard things to come for what they are.

For the rest of the sermon, I am going to emphasize what Jesus emphasizes. Here is what I mean. In v.5 the disciples were discussing how remarkable the Temple was and it was. Jesus

then says something shocking. (v.6) The days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. They want to know when is this going to happen? That is the natural question. Jesus does not answer their question directly. I will get into that a bit more next week. Jesus responds but does not tell them what they want to know but what they need to know. This is very important. When Jesus talks about the timing of these events, he tends to be general and a bit cryptic. But he really zeroes in on our hearts because he wants us our affections, trust and values to be in the right place.

Information about the future (prophecy) is not primarily to inform you so you feel like you can predict what is going to happen and pretend to feel like you have a handle on things. You and I don't have a handle on anything! God has the handle and all that really matters is that he has a hold on you!. Information about the future is given by Christ in order to form your heart around him. This text has hard words, and shocking responses. The first one is seen in verses 9-10.

1. Chaos in this world is your opportunity to trust God. (9-11)

Jesus speaks of wars and tumults (chaos) as things that "must first take place." Wars and tumults are guaranteed. This is our world. I think that Jesus goes on to describe the category of wars in v.10 as "nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom." Tumults are described in v.11 as "earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."

W.W. I was catastrophic. It is estimated that 20 million people died in that war with total casualties being over 37 million. In response to that, the League of Nations was formed in 1920 so that this would never happen again. W.W.1 was supposed to be the war that ended all wars. We learned our lesson, right? Nope. The goal of peace is admirable, but won't happen. War is not shocking. War is the norm. What is shocking is when someone is surrounded by chaos and is not terrified by it. Jesus says, "do not be terrified, for these things (wars and tumults) must first take place, but the end will not be at once."

How on earth can this be true of you? Some of you are sitting here thinking, I pass out when the nurse just wants to draw my blood. I am terrified if I have to give talk in front of a group larger than 3. I'm supposed to go back to school in a month and I don't know where my locker is. I'm anxious if I have to start a new semester, move into a different dorm, or get my oil changed. And Jesus is saying "do not be terrified" about wars and tumults?!

Put your weight (attention) on what is true about God instead of what is uncertain about this world. How do you do that? Protect yourself from influences that tend to generate fear and immerse yourself in truths that generate calm. What does that look like? Tomorrow morning, the alarm on your phone goes off. As you turn it off, you notice 14 notifications and text messages, all demanding a piece of your attention or your heart. Iran fired more missiles at us, we fired more missiles at them. Oil prices are going up. Fires in France are burning out of control. Inflation is up. Trump did this. And the Tigers lost in 11 innings. Then come the text messages asking you to do this, comment about this, pay this bill, don't forget this

appointment, or someone's birthday, you forgot. You can begin your day like that, but you don't have to.

Now let's say that tonight before you go to bed, you turn off your phone and put it in another room. You set your alarm clock for the time you want to get up and, on your nightstand, you place your Bible with a marker in Psalm 46. When your alarm goes off, you get your Bible and for the next 15-20 minutes, slowly read this Psalm, then you pray through it and then journal about it. You end your time by being still before the Lord and knowing that he is God. Knowing and affirming that he will be exalted among the nations and he will be exalted in the earth. You do this every morning for a month. By the end of the month, you have this Psalm memorized. Now, throughout the day, you go back to some of those verses and you sit in them and let the reality of God's power and glory inform and form your posture for that day. Now, when you hear troubling news, it's not that you have to double down, grit your teeth and refuse to panic, no. You hear troubling news, you are affected by it, you can grieve, be concerned, pray, but you are not triggered by it. Your soul has and is assured that God is your refuge and strength no matter what. The lack of panic from big events, prepares you for not being consumed with fear when facing persecution.

2. Persecution is your platform to share the gospel. (12-15)

Jesus is saying this to his disciples who were clearly not super-saints. These guys had all sorts of short-comings and in a couple of days would all abandon Christ because of their fear of their lives. But Jesus knows that they would eventually be faced with persecution. Persecution is hard. We do not seek it. We do not glory in it. It is hard and can be terrifying. So, the idea or perspective that persecution is an opportunity to bear witness, is shocking. It is natural to want to avoid it, but supernatural to be so concerned about the lostness of those doing the persecuting that you share the gospel with them. This is what Paul was talking about in Philippians 1.12-14 (read). This has been the story of faithful believers throughout our history and we stand on their shoulders. We run that race with that baton of faith and faithfulness.

Today you may think that you could never do that. However, if you take the time to consider the lostness of people around you and feel their sense of despair over their condition, you will be moved to pray for them. Pray for the lost. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel. Praying for our missionaries is part of that. Praying for the people who come here who have not yet trusted Christ is part of that. Think about it this way. What if yesterday, God chose to save every lost person you prayed for yesterday, would anyone be saved? When we pray for the lost, we are giving our attention from ourselves to them. We are more concerned about their need than we are our comforts. When this is our walk in this life, our hearts will be ready to use the platform of persecution to make Christ known. That prepares us for the end (or beginning).

3. Your death is your time to be faithful and gain your life. (16-19)

Being hated by all because you are a follower of Christ is hard. Being betrayed by family members is really hard. Being threatened with death and actually dying for your faith in Christ,

is, well that is just about the worst. But Jesus says that even though they put you to death, not a hair of your head will perish. In fact, by your endurance you will gain your lives. This really sounds crazy, doesn't it? How can you be put to death and not a hair of your head perishes? How can you die and yet by your endurance gain your life? Didn't you just lose it?

At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus sees an incredibly poor widow give a minuscule offering at the temple. This is in contrast to the large gifts of the rich and Jesus says that she gave more than all of them. The Kingdom of Christ operates on a value system that is radically different than our world. Genuine faith and love is not measured in dollars, but in cost. Physical death is not the end, but the doorway to life. Faithfulness that is costly is the evidence of a faith that is genuine and genuine faith is the means by which we live with God forever.

How on earth can this be true of me? Does following Christ cost you anything? Does it cost you some relationships because you do not sleep around? Is it inconvenient because you will not lie on your taxes, lie to break a contract, or cheat to get a deal? Do you downplay your faith so you are not singled out for mockery? What does it cost you to be a follower of Christ? Will you ask God to help you embrace the cost and see it as a privilege to be associated with his name? The real cost is not from following Christ, it is from not.