

Hope Amidst Despair

Jesus said... 24 *“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. 28 “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! 30 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. 32 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”* Mark 13:24-37

Context:

1. The context is different from the previous lessons we have looked at in the last 6 weeks
 - a. The previous lessons took place after Jesus’ final **confrontation** with the scribes and Pharisees
 - b. Jesus’ words were an **indictment** and **condemnation** of their leadership and faith.
2. This lesson takes place between **Palm Sunday** and the last supper.
 - a. Jesus is with the disciples in Jerusalem in preparation for the **Passover**.
 - b. There are many travelers and pilgrims present.
 - c. The disciples are in awe of the temple and its power to attract such diversity and devotion

About the temple:

1. This was called **“Herod’s”** temple
 - a. This was the **3rd** temple to occupy this spot.
 - The first two had been destroyed.
 - Construction of the temple was begun in 19 BC, about **14** years before Jesus’ birth
 - It was commissioned by Herod the Great, the Herod mentioned at the time of Jesus’ **birth** (Matthew 2)
 - This is the **father** of the Herod who had Jesus put to death.
 - b. This temple was never **completed**
2. The temple was an object of great beauty
 - It was also a source of Jewish pride
 - It was seen as a physical **manifestation** of the Jewish belief that God was still with them

Jesus’ prediction:

1. Jesus predicts the destruction of this temple: an astonishing, unbelievable, and unbearable thought.
 - So much of the Jewish **identity** was tied to the temple
 - The temple was destroyed in 70 AD, 40 years after Jesus’ prediction

- The **Wailing Wall** in Jerusalem is all that is left of this temple and is a site of Jewish and Christian pilgrimages to this day.
2. The destruction of the temple would be interpreted by the Jews as God's **abandonment** of them.
 - Jesus, in essence, is preparing his disciples for the destruction of this temple.
 - This will require us **re-thinking** our relationship with God
 - We cannot look at objects and buildings and institutions as manifestations of God's presence and love for us

What this means to us?

1. Don't place our hope and faith in a building or in any object made by human hands
2. Our faith will be severely tested if the objects of our faith are human made:
 - **Buildings**
 - **Programs**
 - **Pastors**
 - **Institutions**
 - **Country**
3. These all falter and fail us

The results of the temple's destruction

1. As tragic an event as the destruction of the temple may have been for the Jews, it was the impetus for what we call the *diaspora*
 - a. The *diaspora* is the great **scattering** of the Jews from Israel throughout the world
 - This scattering of the Jews led to the world-wide spread of **Christianity**.
 - b. God took a terrible, national tragedy, and turned it into a source of **blessing** for the world.
 - We need to, amidst the chaos, put our trust in God, not in the objects that we can see and feel
2. This lesson is quite appropriate today.
 - a. Our great human made institutions are on the verge of **collapse**
 - There are others who are putting pressure on them in hopes of their failing
 - Western government and civilization is on the brink
 - Many Americans and Christians have their identity and hope wrapped up in the flag and in our great institutions: they are a sign of God's blessing to some. This is a myopic **arrogance**: what? God doesn't care for the people in Africa?
 - For the first time in my life, I am not so convinced there will be a US in 20 years, at least not as we know it.
 - b. Jesus' words are meant to be a comfort.
 - **Watch** (vs. 37)
 - God will not let us **drown**
 - God is a God who, out of chaos, created the **universe**.
 - God is a God who, out of death brings **new life**.
 - God is a God who, out of the destruction of our human made institutions, blesses the world with **love**.