

King Over End Times

13th April 2014 Waitara Anglican - Luke 21:5-36

(P) Do you recognise these dates? I don't really expect you to. These are a few of the times in recent years that people have predicted that the world will end. The end of the world is something that seems to fascinate a lot of people. Dec 31 2012 was when Warren Jeffs of the Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints said it would end, it didn't. Dec 21 2012 was a longer term prediction, its when the Mayans predicted the world may come to an end, it didn't. May 21 2011 Harold Camping said that the Rapture would happen, then when it didn't, he thought he would have a second crack at it. He is also responsible for the Oct 21 2011 prediction. Unfortunately for him though he was wrong again, it didn't.

Now although we can laugh at these predictions from often questionable religious people, the scientific community also talks about end times. Some speak of the end of the world in the near term because of Global warming, where we are told we can do something about it, or in the other extreme many scientists actually say that the world will come to an end and there is nothing we can do about it, in fact its pretty much a definite thing. Don't worry though its not for another 4 billion years or so when the Sun goes super nova and destroys the earth. This is the other extreme, unlike global warming where we are told to worry about it because we can do something, we tend to ignore the super nova issue because its so far off and not worth worrying about.

Well in this passage of Luke, Jesus gives his prediction, his prophesy about end times. And unlike the examples I have given earlier, Jesus doesn't give an exact date, he implies there is nothing you can do to stop it happening, but does command us to be prepared, to be alert, to watch for its coming.

Our passage today starts with the disciples commenting about how amazing the Temple was. (P) The temple at the time WAS amazing It was the place to go. It was like a Sydney Opera House, except better. The base stones of the building were the size of cars. It was covered in white marble and gold and was described as like seeing a mountain covered in snow from a distance. But Jesus once again shocked his disciples saying the temple is going to be completely destroyed. Not one of those gigantic stones left on top of another.

This would have been a shocking thing for the disciples and the Jews to hear. Not only because the Temple was an amazing building physically, but also because this building was the symbol of God's presence amongst the Jews. The Temple represented their relationship with God.

When the first temple was destroyed it signified Gods punishment of the Jews for defying him and went hand in hand with them being taken off to exile. One of the most important things the Jews had to do when they got back from Exile was to rebuild the Temple. If Jesus said this Temple was going to be destroyed he was saying that Gods judgment was again coming on the Jews.

So given the impact of Jesus statement the disciples naturally ask questions “When will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place? And Jesus answer is very interesting.

From the temple to end times

Jesus ignores the first question and focuses on the second and describes a series of events that explain not only the temples destruction but also the end of the world. (P) It is a passage that can be hard to understand because Jesus deals with multiple different times. I have put an order of events up on the screen. Verses 8-11 occur before the destruction of Jerusalem, verses 12-19 occur before the time in verse 20-24 is the destruction of Jerusalem and then finally Jesus talks about his second coming, the end of the world in verse 25-28. So Jesus is talking about a time that is going to happen in the near future for his disciples, as well as the end of the world.

Why does Jesus decide to also include information about his second coming and the end of the world?. Well, it may be because the disciples and Jews thought that if the Temple and Jerusalem were going to be destroyed that it may be the end of the world as well. For whatever reason, we see that Jesus wants the disciples and us to know about what happens during and leading up to the events of the end, and not to be worried about exactly when they will happen.

What happens (not When it happens)

Have you noticed that? in answering the disciples question he doesn't really talk about When, in terms of time, that these things will happen. He speaks about it in terms of what will happen around those times.

So what does Jesus say. (P) Lets do it in time order starting with verses 12-19. Jesus explains that before Jerusalem and the temple will fall that they will be persecuted. This is not a new prediction for Jesus. He has made it clear throughout his ministry that following him is going to be hard and here Jesus describes the persecution will be from everyone, from leaders to their friends and family. Jesus says they will even put some of you to death. But its not all bad news. Jesus says that in being brought before leaders that they will bear testimony for Jesus. They will be witnesses for him and not only that, God will give them the wisdom to know what to say. Jesus also says that a not a hair of your head will perish. This seems strange given just before he has said some will be put to death. But here

Jesus is talking about eternal life. Ultimately by standing up for what they believe, standing firm in their faith to their friends, family and leaders they will win life, eternal life.

This first prediction of Jesus certainly comes true. It doesn't take long after Jesus death that the first Christian is killed by the Jews for standing firm in his faith.

Luke records Stephen's death in his second book in Acts 7.

(P) Then jumping back to verse 8-11, Jesus tells them what will happen after that persecution. There will be false prophets, wars, natural disasters and signs from heaven. Again these things are all recorded in the lead up to AD70 when the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed. There were wars, there were people claiming to be the Messiah and there were great signs from heaven in the form of comets all in the years leading up to Jerusalem's destruction. But as Jesus said although these were signs of Jerusalem's end, it would not come right away and they were not to be deceived and not to be afraid.

(P) Then Jesus finally gets to what will happen when Jerusalem is about to be destroyed in verse 20-24. Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies and there will be great distress. Jesus says it will be punishment coming on the Jewish nation for not obeying God and rejecting yet another prophet, this time Gods own Son. Jesus says they will fall by the sword and prisoners will be taken.

This prophesy was also fulfilled. Josephus, the Jewish historian records that in AD70 when Rome besieged and attacked Jerusalem, they destroyed the temple and killed a million people, capturing almost 100,000 as slaves. Jerusalem was trampled on by Gentiles. Jesus calls it the time of the Gentiles. But this time of the Gentiles wasn't all bad news.

With Jesus coming into the world, it meant that no longer was God only for the Jewish people, it meant that God was now the God of all nations. Everyone now has the opportunity to have a personal and loving relationship with God, the creator of the world. This includes us today, we can have a relationship with God, we can call him our Father. But Jesus also warns, that this time won't go on forever, there will be a second and final time when Jesus will return and it will be terrifying. The time of Gentiles will come to an end as it says in verse 24 and Jesus describes what happens then in verse 25-28.

(P) Similar to the lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem there will be heavenly signs. On earth there will be huge natural disasters. But there is a significant difference between when Jerusalem was destroyed and this time. Because this is when the Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and Glory. The Son of Man who is Jesus, a reference back to Daniel 7 which speaks of the Son of Man coming

to Judge and Rule the world. This is when Jesus says redemption is drawing near. When Jesus returns, it will be the time when everyone stands before him and is judged.

(P) There are 2 responses to these events happening. One response is to be in anguish and terror because you know that you have rejected God. The other response is having a confidence, that you are safe standing before Jesus, knowing you'll be with him forever. The difference is simple, those who have stood firm, who have stayed strong in their faith will win life and will enter the Kingdom of God. Those that have rejected Jesus will be in anguish.

Finally he finishes saying that this generation will not pass away until these things have happened.

(P) Before explaining how all this affects us, I just want to give a brief explanation of what "this generation" means. Because it is confusing and can easily distract us from what Jesus is trying to teach us. I think at first glance we often read "this generation" as in the disciples listening to Jesus. That becomes very confusing when Jesus says that the Son of man will come back. So how does this work? There are a number of explanations, but the one I think fits best is this, that the "this generation" that Jesus is referring to is not the disciples generation it's the generation from the previous paragraph, the generation that sees the Son of Man etc. Now you may think that's a redundant statement then. Why would Jesus say that the people of the end time will see the end time. Well what he is saying is that "this generation" that see the signs that start the last days, will also see the end of it. Things will go from signs in the sun, moon and stars to the Kingdom of God drawing near in one Generation. It will come quickly. This is reinforced by his warning in verse 34-36. Be always on watch.

Prophecy & us today

So, having gone through all these predictions by Jesus, how does it affect us today?

(P) Well it can be a little difficult, as we look at Jesus prophecy' and try to figure out which bits were meant just for the times leading up to the Temple being destroyed, and which bits were meant for Jesus second coming and which bits could be both? It can be confusing.

But, having said that prophecies can be confusing, one of the great things about prophecy is that it would often point back to something God had already had done or did not long after the prophet, prophesied about it. That way those listening could trust what the prophet was saying, could trust that God would do what he said. Well it's the same here. Parts of Jesus prophecy happened within 50 years of

Jesus saying it. There was reason to trust this prophecy to be true. The Christians of the first century had seen what Jesus had said come true in verses 8-19 so when they saw Jerusalem being surrounded like he said in verse 20, history says that many of the Christians obeyed Jesus and fled Jerusalem so that when Rome came to destroy it many of the Christians weren't actually there. Because they believed what Jesus had said they were saved from that terrible destruction.

Now I don't think verses 20-24 are directed at us. I don't think if we see the church here surrounded that we immediately need to flee. But there are instructions for us as well. There are things we can do to avoid destruction if we follow Jesus. I think we can learn some general principles from 8-19 and we have some specific instructions in verses 25-36.

(P) What we need to know: Be Prepared

(P) We don't need to know the date and specific time of the end of the world.

Jesus specifically warned his disciples not to follow the Harold Camping's of the world. Jesus says – don't be fooled by those who will claim that now is the time, now is the end of the world!

But just because we don't know the date, doesn't mean we should ignore the coming end of the world either. What do we need to know?

(P) That Jesus will return, it will come quickly, and we need to be prepared. That is the key message for us here as we wait. How do we be prepared?

I remember when I was younger I would love to meet my Dad outside our house when he got home from work. Now sometimes I would know what train and what time he would come home, because he had rung ahead. On those days I would stay inside until the last few minutes, playing computer games, reading books watching TV. Other times though he would not have called ahead and on those days I was constantly at the window or on the front lawn keeping a look out for when he was going to come.

It's a good reason for us not to know the date and time for the end of the world as it helps us be motivated, to be constantly prepared. If the end is going to come quickly we can't be slacking off, waiting until the last minute to get ready for Jesus coming because we don't know when he will come.

Jesus says in verse 34 don't be distracted. - Don't be caught up in the pleasures of this world, don't be caught up with earthly things with study, or money or houses or cars. We can be so involved in enjoying this life that we forget why we are here

and what is to come. Nor should we focus on the stresses and troubles in life. We shouldn't get caught up in anxiety and hard times. We need to keep our eyes lifted up, focused on heaven.

We need to pray. As Emily reminded us praying the Lord's Prayer allows us to focus on God and his kingdom, and we are also reminded that it is Jesus who saves us from eternal death.

We need to be aware that we will be persecuted, it shouldn't be a surprise that this world will give us a hard time. We need to be prepared and stand firm in our faith.

We know that when Jesus returns and judges everyone – that is the last day.

What is your attitude going to be on that day?

Will you be terrified and faint, and realise that throughout your life you rejected the sovereign ruler of the World.

Or will you be confident to stand before God, because you were prepared, reading his word, praying to him, praying that you not be caught up in the pleasures of this world.