

LUKE 19:28 - 21:38

Since Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51) he has traveled steadily toward the cross. His ministry along the way reflects both his intensified sense of purpose and the limited amount of time remaining to accomplish his mission.

He continues to teach the disciples and the crowds who follow as well as a great variety of people encountered along the way. He has taught that discipleship, though demanding, difficult and now, life-threatening, leads to wholeness of life and eternal life. Those who choose to follow him participate in his mission, seeking the lost and proclaiming the kingdom of God which is an eternal fellowship seeking deeper roots on earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom itself as both present reality and future certainty, has been the object of much misunderstanding, not only among the scoffing scribes and Pharisees but also among the disciples. The kingdom is not gained without cost, as events of the coming days will show.

As this section begins, Jesus enters the city, goes directly to the temple, throws out those who sell, then comes there daily to teach. As during the preceding journey, not all those who have gathered around Jesus are there to learn and respond with faith. Enemies multiply and their hostility grows.

19:28-39 – Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Jesus comes into Jerusalem and accepts the cheers of the crowds hailing him King. However, everything he does reveals that he is not a typical king. He doesn’t come riding on a powerful horse with an army, but on a humble donkey accompanied by peasants and children. His is a different kind of power.

19: 41-44 – Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

Jesus weeps because in rejecting him and the visitation of God in him, Israel (Jerusalem being the capital where the leadership reside and run things) is sealing its doom in following a destructive course of violence against violence which will lead to disaster for the nation and the people.

19: 45-48 – Jesus Cleanses the Temple

The cleansing and the words of judgement are not about money exchanged. This was a necessary practice so that people could purchase livestock for sacrifices. Rather, in disrupting the buying and selling, Jesus was disrupting the temple worship. It was a prophetic act prophesying that the temple worship (rooted in sacrifices) will come to an end when it is destroyed. The religious leadership who are also the political leadership, headquartered in the temple, are leading the people away from God’s true vision and into disaster. They are thieves and robbers of what truly belongs to God.

20: 1-8 – The Authority of Jesus Questioned

The ruling authorities are trying to undermine Jesus' credibility before the people, but also to find something he says that is a chargeable offence. It's part of their plan to get him executed. By turning the issue on John the Baptist, Jesus is making the authorities uncomfortable before the people. If they say anything bad about John the people will react against them because they revere John as a prophet. If they say something good about John, they will undermine themselves because John denounced them. They back off and Jesus refuses to give them an answer they can use against him.

20: 9-19 – The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

This parable reveals how Jesus sees himself in relation to all the prophets that came before him. All of them criticized the established political and religious leadership of Israel and they all paid a terrible price for it. Jesus, too, will pay a terrible price. But Jesus also reveals that he is different than the prophets before him. He is God's own child, and so, just rejecting him and making him suffer is not enough. They must kill him. The authorities present are enraged at this brazen, open denunciation of them. They want to remove him there and then, but with all the people already riled up, a riot may occur. They have to plan a more covert capture of Jesus.

20: 20-26 – The Question about Paying Taxes

Once again, the authorities try to entrap Jesus. Paying taxes is a hot political issue. To declare that paying taxes is right is giving in to Roman oppression. Rome uses tax dollars to pay its army which then keeps Israel subjugated. To declare that paying taxes is wrong would make Jesus liable to the charge of treason with the Roman authorities, something the religious authorities could use to get rid of Jesus. On his part, Jesus escapes this trap by focusing the issue on allegiance to God. The emphasis on money is dear to the heart of the religious establishment, given their wealth. Their wealth is based on Roman currency. The only way to have true allegiance to God and a truly revolutionary spirit is to give up wealth and give your heart to God. Rome can have your money given the inscription on the coin, which is theirs, but your soul belongs to God alone.

20: 27-40 – The Question About the Resurrection

The Sadducees are the elite of the establishment. They run the temple. Scribes are part of the Sadducees group, whereas Pharisees run synagogues all over the country and the diaspora. Sadducees only hold to the first five books of the bible called the books of Moses or the Torah where resurrection is never mentioned. They don't believe in an afterlife or anything beyond, unlike the Pharisees and most people at the time who did believe in the resurrection.

They present Jesus with a theoretical situation, trying to show how ridiculous it would be if there is a resurrection. According to Jewish law, if applied, should a brother die without having any children to carry on his bloodline, a surviving brother, unmarried, should take his wife and provide him children. It was a crazy law and it's questionable how often it was applied. The problem in this case, though, is whether the woman in question has anything to say about her life and her body. Jesus speaks of the resurrection as an opportunity for everyone, men and women, not to be bound by human laws based on tragic circumstances of dying without children and the inequality of males being privileged with rights and obligations a woman has no say in. According to Jesus, in the resurrection of the dead, women and men will be free to be without such entanglements as marriage. All of us will be as intimate as family and gender-equal. Jesus also points to suggestive passages within the first five books of the bible where resurrection is supported, even though the word itself isn't used.

20: 41-44 – The Question about David's Son

Jesus points to the fact that even though the Messiah is a descendant of King David, as Son of God abiding eternally with God, the author of the Psalm quoted who is David refers to the Messiah as his Lord. Thus the Messiah is prior to King David and has abided eternally with God.

20: 45-47 – Jesus Denounces the Scribes

Jesus judges and condemns. When is judgement and condemnation of others legitimate? - when it is not spoken out of hate or resentment or bitterness, but for the sake of speaking truth and promoting justice.

21: 1-4 – The Widow's Offering

Giving is not evaluated by how much but by what percentage. The widow's offering is nothing compared to the rich in terms of monetary value. And yet, the percentage she gives of what she has speaks of a far greater devotion.

21: 5-24 – The Destruction of the Temple, Signs and Persecutions and the Destruction of Jerusalem all foretold

Jesus has been alluding to this destruction happening should Israel's leaders continue to lead the people along a path of building up hate and bitterness to fuel an armed revolt against Rome. Jesus, on the other hand, has been preaching a different kind of revolution – building a kingdom where all are treated with respect and care, and this means forgiving enemies and embracing the weakest and most marginalized because of sin, disability or low status. Israel must model the divine kingdom as a nation and then spread the revolution outward. Even though the world around them may reject and even crush such an initiative, it is the only way to feed a different hope for the world and its healing.

But Israel has bought into the worldly way of using power and might to destroy their enemies and get what it wants for itself. Unfortunately, Jesus predicts disaster – for the temple itself, for the capital city Jerusalem, and for many of their people. He also recognizes that many of his followers will suffer too because they are Jews. They may even be blamed by other Jews for the failure of the nation to achieve power. They must prepare for that not by not anxiously planning their defense, but rather, learning how to trust in the guiding power of the Holy Spirit of Christ. Some will not only suffer, but be killed. Yet, eternally speaking, they will be saved for a life even greater.

21: 25-28 – The Coming of the Son of Man

Apocalyptic doom and gloom language is about the end of the world as we know it. But the end will not be the end. Something new will be born. The newness is based on the coming of the Son of Man. Now is this a bringing together of the second coming of Christ and the end of Israel as a semi-independent nation which happened in 70AD? If so, the second coming didn't happen. Alternatively, it may be that the Son of Man's coming (which is the language of the Biblical book of Daniel), is about his words/prophecy being vindicated and his followers experiencing his presence among them in a whole new way. It's a matter of interpretation.

21: 29-33 – The Lesson of the Fig Tree

Look for the signs of what's to come. Just like the signs of fruit coming on a fig tree, so will be the signs of the impending doom. But beyond the doom there is redemption for you. You will experience living within the kingdom of God even as you also live in the world in difficult times. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual fellowship.

21: 34-38 – Exhortation to Watch

Christians are called to be alert, watchful, and ready to engage what is coming. They are also to keep praying for strength, wisdom and guidance to get through what is coming. There is an emphasis here on preparation, while earlier there is an emphasis on trusting the Holy Spirit. Both are important.

How do we prepare for what's to come, especially the trouble? How do we rely ever more deeply on the Holy Spirit?