

November 13, 2022 - "What Time is It?"

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 21:5-19

"When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."

They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them.

"When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

"But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

A man opens a newspaper and discovers it is dated six months in advance of the time he lives. Reading through the newspaper, he discovers stories about events that have not yet taken place. He turns to the sports page and sees scores of games not yet played. He turns to the financial page and discovers the rise or fall of different stocks and bonds. He realizes this information can make him a wealthy man. A few large bets on an underdog team can make him wealthy. Investments in stocks that are now low but will go high can fatten his portfolio. He is delighted.

He turns the page and comes to the obituary column and sees his picture and story. Everything changes. The knowledge of his death changes his view about his wealth.

On what information and teachings do we build our lives? What is the foundation for that which we organize and plan our lives? Do we gravitate towards the voices calling out to us with temptations that satisfy our desires for prosperity, and ease? The words of Jesus from today's text are a wake-up call for all people, and should be taken seriously, today, not tomorrow, for time is of the essence.

Luke tells us that Jesus was talking with followers, not just his disciples, at the beautifully adorned rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. The original Temple had been destroyed in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, when he conquered Jerusalem.

Darrell Bock, in his commentary of Luke describes the following about the rebuilding of the temple project. "It had recently been restored by Herod the Great. The workmanship was of excellent quality. It had taken eighty years to complete and included new foundation walls through which Herod had significantly enlarged the temple. Sparing no expense, he had employed the most talented artisans to use the best materials for the project such as white marble that was up to sixty-seven feet long, twelve feet high and twelve feet wide. Blue, scarlet, and purple Babylonian tapestries made of fine linen formed a veil at the entrance. He had installed gold and silver-plated gates and gold-plated doors throughout."

On this day, the people were admiring its stones and the gifts that had been dedicated to God, and why wouldn't they? The Temple was beautiful. Much to their dismay, Jesus told them that the beautiful Temple would soon be destroyed. You would think that they would have wondered, "How could that be possible?"

As unthinkable as this may have been for them, Jesus' followers did not ask him **how** he knew about the temple's forthcoming destruction or how it would happen. They only asked him **when** the destruction would happen. This exchange between Jesus and his followers demonstrates that they wholeheartedly believed that Jesus was sent by God. Therefore, if Jesus said the temple was going to be destroyed, they believed it in fact, would happen. But when, Jesus, "when?" is what they wanted to know.

In other words, they asked, "What time is it? Are we getting close? Are we there yet?" In his response, Jesus does not answer when this will all happen. Instead, he said basically something like, "What time is it?" Okay, it's time to be cautious of religious impostors. It's time to be aware that things could get hazardous for a while. It's time to remember that our lives are in the hands of God. It's time to remember that nothing can separate us from God's love." Instead of offering us a time when this will happen, he assures them of a day when he will return, and he turns their focus towards the question, "what will you do in the meantime?"

For us, today, the question, "What time is it?," should not be asked of Jesus about the timing of his return. We already know that is an unknown. The Bible tells us that. Even Jesus said that. Instead, we should be asking, what time is it for us, "what should we be doing in the meantime to guard ourselves against being deceived by false teachers and prophets? What will we do to build our endurance for facing the uncertain and troubling times ahead for us? What will we do to keep our hold on God?"

What time is it? It is time to be disciplined, disciplined in nurturing our spiritual health. Ask yourself, do I spend enough time reading and studying the Word of God? Do I take time to pray to God, and to listen for His voice? Do I give time to praise and worship God, not just on Sunday mornings, but also throughout the week? In other words, am I taking time to strengthen, to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ on which my life stands? If so, we will be better equipped to navigate the tumultuous waters we have yet to face.

One commentator, after commending any preacher who spoke from this difficult text that if the preacher spoke on spiritual disciplines, the congregation would be unsatisfied. He said they would rather hear about the end times and theories about what will transpire. That's what will get the congregation excited.

He was not suggesting preachers do that. I agree. In my understanding of God's Word, if we can't discuss disciplines, we might as well not talk about the end times and Christ's return because no one will be ready if we don't have disciplines. Discipline keep us on the straight and narrow while we navigate our way through whatever is to come. Knowledge alone will not prepare us.

Is it true that we don't want to take seriously Christ's warning and be disciplined. If it is, then it seems to me we cheapen God's Word, simplifying it to nothing more than a good movie that moves us and excites us, requiring nothing of us. We are really missing the boat if we do not engage with the scriptures, including the ones that speak about the future. The scriptures, God's Word call us to be disciplined.

Someone is reported to have asked a violinist in New York's Carnegie Hall how she became so skilled. She said that it was by "planned neglect." She planned to neglect everything that was not related to her goal.

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Practicing spiritual disciplines is planned neglect that keeps on track, no matter how hard things get, so that we reach our eternal goal with Christ.

What time is it? It is time to choose Jesus and not the deceivers of the world. There are and will continue to be false prophets out there in the world trying to sway us from the truths of God. They will try to manipulate us during times of personal vulnerability, pulling on our fragile emotions, to create doubts about the existence and sovereignty of God.

The deceivers will tell us when we are suffering that there cannot possibly be a God. If there was a God and he loved you, he would not allow you to suffer. False prophets influence our world with selfishness and with apathy for others. Their message to us is that we should look out for "number one." They say God wants us to be happy and to prosper, which indeed he does, but not at the expense of others. If we do not purposely choose to focus on and follow Jesus, we can fall victim to these lies that will in the end, separate us from our Eternal God.

It seems then, **if** we want to endure and persevere through the difficulties and suffering in our future, it does us no good to ask Jesus, "how long?" or "when will you come to end our suffering?" But, instead, we should ask ourselves what we can do in the meantime. Clearly, there are those who understood this, otherwise the church would not exist today.

Turning the clock ahead from the day that Jesus spoke to those followers gathered at the Temple; we learn that the Temple, in fact, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., but neither Judaism nor Christianity were destroyed. That's because the Spirit of God transcends all buildings and structures. Both religions continued to grow and develop over the centuries, spreading all over the world, and welcoming people of all ethnicities and races. **This happened because the Temple became the people of God through which God did, and still does his work in the building of his kingdom.**

Debra Mumford, writer of commentary for this text on "Working Preacher" says, "People can take heart that though Christianity seems to be declining in some denominations, through the Spirit and power of God, it will continue to live and grow in new forms and new places. Our task is to ask for discernment about what God wants us to do and then follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit to get it done."

Therefore, we ask ourselves again, "What time is it?" It is time to spread the Good News and help to get the lost on-board with Jesus. Jesus tells us that this is not going to come easily. People will reject what we share, and they may reject us, this includes even our friends and family. However, he assures us through verses 17-19, "You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls." We know that many of those listening to Jesus that day, did suffer and die for spreading the Gospel, but as the scripture says, they gained their souls, which are eternal, the body isn't. Hallelujah! This is good news for us! Who of us does not want to have God on our side! Who of us does not want our souls to dwell in and with the goodness and love of God!

And we must ask ourselves, who among us would not want those we love to know Jesus? Is it not worth all of our efforts, even though it may be uncomfortable for us, to lead others to Jesus, into his forgiveness and love? As Christians, blessed by the love and mercy of God; and freed from sin through the sacrifice of His only Son, our brother, Jesus, we cannot and will not refuse the opportunity to spread the Good News through word and deed. Our faith simply will not allow it. It is time for all Christians to point the way to Jesus before it is too late.

"What time is it?" Those who truly believe Jesus to be the Savior of the World are not troubled by questions involving the timing of God's plans for the future of His creation. **They**

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know it as a fact that God wins in the end, and that's all they need to know. The Word of God tells us this. We have all the information we need about what is yet to happen.

For the faithful, the question is what will I do in the meantime? How will this information, these things that I read in the Bible, not the newspaper, change and shape me and what I do? Instead of asking "When, Lord?," I encourage you to ask God and call upon the Holy Spirit, to help you to build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ to carry you through the future and into the promises of the good He has for you. And be an open Temple where the Spirit of God flourishes and meets others through you.

What time is it? It is, and always will be throughout all of eternity, God's time. May that fact—that promise made to us by God—give us all peace and endurance for in the meantime. Amen.