

# Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

## BREAKING NEWS

Luke 21:5-19

## Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Ron Starenko

5When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he (Jesus) said, 6"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."

7They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" 8And 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.

9"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." 10Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

12"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. 13This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in

advance; 15for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. 16You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17You will be hated by all because of my name. 18But not a hair of your head will perish. 19By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The Bad News-Broken, In Ruins**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *All Will Be Thrown Down (v. 6)*

Imagine that you have joined a crowd, admiring St. Peter's Basilica in Rome or Westminster Abbey in London, and some crack-pot standing nearby shouts, "All will be thrown down!" You might raise your eyebrows and walk away. No breaking news there, that is, not until a terrorist blows up a church, or a subway, or a hotel, the kind of news the media thrives on these days, stirring up fear. Hollywood gets into the act, too, producing movies about intergalactic wars, planets spinning out of control, even the world coming to an end. Though we might consider it all to be exciting entertainment, underneath we harbor a hidden anxiety, as every day we live with disturbing news that is real. There's nothing far-fetched about reports of warlike tensions in the Middle East, or earthquakes such as those in Haiti or Chile, or asteroids colliding in the far reaches of space. And, what about the impact of church denominations in upheaval, or our economic system in danger of collapsing, or our inner cities imploding, or the fabric of our society coming apart, all of it, as we speak, breaking news that is bad news?

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Lead Astray (v. 8)*

Who wants to see all of the things we know and love coming to an end? To escape the threat we will bury our heads in the sand. We might even indulge ourselves with a fascinated interest in futuristic schemes, also as a way to manage our fears. Yet, we remain vulnerable to fear-mongering. Jesus knew how easily we are led astray when things are coming down around our ears, deluded by those who use scare tactics, false prophets whipping up fear, urging us to follow their end-of-the-world scenarios. Above all, he knows how vulnerable we are to the attacks of the demons of darkness that suck at our souls (v. 19), the fierce battles raging within our hearts, not obvious or sensational enough to be considered breaking news, yet scarier, even more destructive, than the threat of wars, earthquakes, famines, and plagues (v.10).

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *As the Crashing End Comes (v. 9)*

Scary, too, to be betrayed by family and friends, who fear the authorities more than loving their own, perhaps even complicit in our death, as we might be called upon to appear “before kings and governors” (v. 12), who have the power to execute us. Still, the breaking news gets worse. In the end we must contend with the King who stands behind the breaking news of wars and calamities and persecutions, who judges nations, institutions, also all persecutors and the persecuted, the betrayers and the betrayed, the war-mongers and the war-torn. When all have been “thrown down” (v. 8), what then? When all the bad news must be dealt with, when the “the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble” (Mal. 4:1a) and the Adams and Eves that we are have no place to hide, what then? When the reckoning, the settling of accounts, and the testifying against us takes place, who will endure? Who can contemplate such an end, much less escape it?

## PROGNOSIS: The Good News-Healed, Raised Up

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *The Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2)*

But, listen up! All that bad news, all the apocalyptic drama disclosing the end times, all the unsettling statements we have in the Old Testament, the Book of Revelation, including some of the words of Jesus, all of it is more than matched by breaking good news. The prophet Malachi, speaking to us today, trumps the bad news, announcing the coming of the One like Elijah, “the sun of righteousness...with healing in his wings.” Who would that be other than our Lord Jesus, who did not enter heaven in a fiery chariot, but rather, rose from the ashes of a crucified death in a phoenix-like resurrection, the ultimate breaking good news, eternal in scope? Indeed, when Jesus stands before the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, knowing that it will be thrown down, as everything has its day, a sign of the crushing curse of God’s judgment, consuming all, he also foretells an apocalyptic victory, promising that “not a hair of your head will perish” (v. 18). Earlier in his ministry, after attacking the abuses perpetrated in the temple, his enemies wanted a sign to justify his actions. What Jesus gave them was the promise of a new day, speaking of the temple of his body, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). The rising of the temple of his body, from the ashes of his redeeming ruin, is the breaking good news, disclosing that the end is underway, a new creation, a new humanity, now forming.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *Words and Wisdom (v. 15) to Sustain Us*

Since we have Jesus going for us, as the good news breaks into our lives, the words of wisdom to believe, we have in our grasp what is already the promised future. Jesus made this reality quite clear on another occasion when his enemies accused him of breaking the Sabbath, giving them and now us this breaking news:

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). Incredible, what Jesus affirms and what we get to believe, that in the midst of a world coming apart and the darkness that engulfs us, including the judgment of God, all of which strikes terror in our hearts, we are already living the end, connected to Jesus who is the wisdom of God. Such wisdom, good news that it is, is so good, that it creates faith and hope in our hearts that saves us. Just how real that is, in us and around us, we need look no further than our baptism where we have “endured” (v. 19) the drowning, sustained also by the Holy Eucharist, the promised end, the resurrection, “as not a hair of your head will perish” (v. 18). What better breaking good news could we have than knowing that by our faith we already have what we believe, all of what Jesus has done for us, and is still doing, and will yet do? The decisive apocalyptic victory of God has already happened, sustaining us now through any and every calamity.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : An Opportunity to Testify (v. 13)**

As a result we get to be people who live the end, living off Jesus’ victory, making a statement, putting our faith, our very life, on the line, making a witness when necessary “before kings and governors” (v. 12). We are people who no longer follow the destructive agendas of the world, honoring instead the reign of Jesus, at the risk of martyrdom. And, even if that crisis doesn’t happen, we are called to lay down our lives just the same in these uncertain times, as St. Paul wrote in today’s second lesson, “not to be weary in doing what is right” (2 Thessalonians 3:13). Some of the early Christians were tempted to use “the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1), the not yet, as an excuse to bail out, to sit and wait, succumbing to fear or lapsing into complacency, impotent and irrelevant. The apostle’s

formula for living in the end times was to live with a faith that is active in love. If indeed the creation is destined "to be set free from its bondage to decay (to) obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21), then surely we are called to be vigilant in caring for this earth and all humanity by our lifestyle, by our relationships of love and good will, and by our transparent hope in God's word and promise. Believing in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, we have what it takes to build up what is being thrown down as a testimony to what God is now doing among us, what ultimately God will accomplish in and through Jesus, any and all reports of which will certainly be breaking news, a sign of the in-breaking of the "new heavens and a new earth where righteousness is at home" (2 Peter 3:13).