

# Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

## HOW DOES THE “END” COME?

Luke 21; 5-19

Pentecost 24 (Proper 28)

Analysis by Norbert E. Kabelitz

5 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he 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.”

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

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.” 10 Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11 there 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. 13 This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14 So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15 for 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: “Red Sky in the Morning, Sailors Take Warning”**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *No Security in Stone*

Beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God (v. 5) suggest guaranteed divine protection and security, not vulnerability and devastation, right? Bruce Vawter (quoted in Mark Link’s Seventh Trumpet) says it best. “The whiteness of the Temple’s massive stones (42ft long, 14 ft high, 20 ft wide-Josephus) and the gold of its facade made it one of the known wonders of the world, and no Jew could look upon it without feeling a natural surge of pride in his race and religion. Thus the shock...caused by Jesus’ words. Who could conceive of a world without the Temple? The end of the Temple would mean the end of sacrifice, and surely sacrifice would end only with the world itself” (p. 150). How shocking and embarrassing it would be that the beauty and promising protection of the Temple cannot and would not be a “refuge” claimed for it. (See Jeremiah’s Temple sermon, 7:4-10). “Do not trust these deceptive words, ‘The Temple of the Lord...we are safe.’” Just when we think we have it together, Jesus tells us everything is going to fall apart! But is that not so? “Not in our Temples made with hands God the Almighty, is dwelling” (from the hymn “Built on a Rock”).

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Bewitched, Led Astray*

If not the Temple, how about divinely led leaders? How easily many (us too) are led astray and bewitched with the fear of “these things” (“tauta” in Greek, vv. 6, 7, 9, 12, 28) that threaten and destroy. Is it a sign of faithlessness to ask for a sign about the “when”? If not, why does Jesus say, “This generation is an evil generation. It asks for a sign, but no sign shall be given it except the sign of Jonah” (Lk 11:29-32). Repentance is indeed the sign! For unfaith has the disastrous effect of fear, because we fear and love God less than “these things.” Otherwise why the overwhelming attraction for so many who hear the cry “The Time is Near!”, or “Rapture time!” or “Don’t be left behind!” Instead of being “aware,” we are bewitched!. Fear determines the nature and character of believing rather than the “Promise of His coming,” (see 2 Peter 3:4). How can we sing the hymn “Through all the changing scenes of life, In trouble and in Joy...and “Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear! (v. 6, hymn by S. Howard, 1750). Terror reigns (v. 9) when we fail to see Jesus Himself as “the Sign”, the “Son of Man, greater than Solomon (and the Temple), greater than Jonah (Lk 11:29-32).

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – The End time, Day of Wrath?**

The end does come (v. 9). The question is, Does it come slowly or suddenly? With a bang or a whimper? Without the fear, love and trust in God (above all things), the world becomes a wasteland of military and civil strife (vv. 9-10). Natural disasters are seen as the expression of divine wrath “accompanied by dreadful portents and great signs in heaven.” While every generation has its quota of such “things,” there is more. Resistance to the Gospel, manifest rejection of God’s involvement in human affairs, “why did the Gentiles rage?” (Acts 4:25). Apart from faith in the Promise, these things become a signal of divine negative judgment! Not only on “that Day” but

as Ed Schroeder might say, "Apocalypse Now!?" Franz Kafka (1883-1924), a Czech born writer observes, "Only our concept of time makes it possible to speak of the Day of Judgment by that name; in reality it is a summary court in perpetual session!" Isn't that why Jesus says, "the days" will come? (v. 6)

## **PROGNOSIS: Red Sky at Night, Sailors Delight!**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *Greet the Savior, Face the Judge*

Why does Jesus weep over Jerusalem (and her Temple)? Because we did not or do not recognize the time of our visitation" (Lk 19:41-44). The Day, the time, the Kingdom, the Visitation are after all Jesus Himself who came and comes as authorized Judge (see Rom 2:16). How else could this be but that Jesus Himself stood under threat and judgment for us, and for our sake makes the exchange of life for death (vv. 18, 19). Jesus Himself for us is God's Temple (John 2:19-21) and "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up!" (See also Eph 3:20b regarding a living Temple). The "End" is Jesus Himself as Omega, therefore Terror be gone, do not be terrified! The Promise holds: a New Creation!

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *Passing the Testing*

We trust the outcome of the story, the Promise of the Gospel. While we have no guarantee that Christ's "I have overcome the world" will make tender the secular king, or Governor, or the Synagogue leaders, we are given the power to "endure" (v. 19). The anchor of our faith is "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory." While worldly competition and power for control leads to hostilities and persecution, how else will the gold of our faith be refined? Endurance is the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith that has known the "time of the Visitation of Christ."

**Step 6: Final Diagnosis (External Solution)** – *Opportunity for*

### *Testimony*

It's a time of and for testimony (v. 15). Words and wisdom no opponent can contradict. Why not sing, "The strife is o'er, the battle won!" While Jesus does not say it directly, how about "One Greater is here!" How about Jesus, Bigger than the Temple in its glory, Bigger than Kings and Governors, Bigger than betrayal in families, bigger than shooting stars and portents. He makes time, and "in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, Emmanuel. So while we wait we pray, "Keeping in mind the end of all things and in the day of judgment, may we be stirred to holiness of life here and live with you in the world to come. Amen." Or, as John Ylvisaker says in his hymn "Borning Cry": "When the evening gently closes in!" Sounds like red sky at night-sailors delight.