

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

THE END

Luke 21:5-19

Twenty-Sixth 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 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 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Already/Not Yet

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : “...burning like an oven” (Mal. 4:1)

It is not necessary these days to turn to the Bible to gather an interest in the end times. Best-selling books and sensational movies are doing it for us, as we speak. Cosmic wars, depicting death and disorder and destruction, much like the prophet Malachi’s predictions, “burning like an oven,” seem to be the topics-of-the-day. Sigmund Freud was right when he observed how human beings are fascinated with death, recognizing how we are not so much running from death but rather to it. What better way, then, for us to express that obsession than to become preoccupied with “gloom and doom,” as though the end was already here.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : “having neither root nor branch” (Mal. 4:1)

Behind all of this foreboding is a kind of arrogance, as though by our fascination we will somehow dismiss it as “fun and games,” and thereby overcome our deep-seated fear, a behavior we resort to every day when we imagine that we have power over death, living, eating, driving, as though “the end’ would never happen to us, what the prophet calls fateful arrogance (4:1). So, we blunder on, unaware that what we believe to be not yet is actually already here. The day that is coming, says the prophet, is a reality now, “burning like an oven (having)...neither root

nor branch.” Even as we speak, forest fires continue to rage in the west, offering us a sign how being unaware and unprepared can be a fatal thing indeed.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *barren, burned out, buried*

While we may think our moves are only futuristic, their themes of death and destruction in fact deal with a present reality. In case we haven't noticed, the books about universal mayhem, cosmic destruction, even our flippant references to hell, as though it too was a future possibility, is here-and-now. The smoking rubbish heap Jesus spoke about (Mark 10:42-44; Matt. 13:42) is the fate of human existence that does not “revere my name... says the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 4:2-3). To be sure, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, all are a going through a judgment of fire, a kind of hell with cosmic consequences. Yes, what is not yet is already. Scary!

PROGNOSIS: Not Yet/Already

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Cosmic Deliverance*

Likewise, as an answer to the state of affairs that exists all around us, from the personal issues that bury us to the larger worldwide calamities that engulf us, God will enter the furnace of fire and do a cosmic redemption and restoration. And, God will do a complete make-over of us and all things through nothing other and nothing less than the death and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, it is Jesus who passes through the fire of the cross, suffers the judgment of God upon human folly, the “wrecks of time,” suffers away the consequences of our fall, the death and hell we deserve, then rises from that death, creating an altogether new universal order, already a reality, as God “will wipe every tear from (our) eyes,” ... (as) “death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more...” (Rev. 21:4). The

world of human disorder, which we experience in wars, earthquakes, famines, plagues, all signs of what we are responsible for and deserve, the end, the cosmic and eternal hall we have created, all gets visited on Jesus, who descended into hell (1 Peter 3:19), then followed by his resurrection from the hell he suffered, the paradise he created, the end already disclosed. Here is cosmic deliverance, not only from my sins and yours, but more than that, from our world, our death, our hell, all are burned to death on the cross.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Cosmic Embrace*
Jesus is more than our “personal Savior,” though he is that also; he is the cosmic, global, universal, the beginning-and-end Lord. When nations and kingdoms have ceased to be, when wars and earthquakes and famines are no more, Jesus gathers the created universe, the nations, the churches into his presence, a cosmic embrace already begun, waiting to be completed. He is not, never has been anybody’s personal Savior, as though a one-to-one relationship is all that matters. Jesus is not only the church’s Lord; he is King everywhere. For the time being, he will be present, the Christus Victor and the Christus Rex that he already is, still laying his glory aside (Phil. 2:5-11), blessing and embracing us with his Spirit, claiming us and the whole creation, in fact, signaling the end, the completion of all that is and is to come, beginning with our baptism, continuing in the Meal.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Everyday Endurance*
While it might seem at times that when we are “playing church” we are removing ourselves from the world, we are actually being prepared and propelled into the world, empowered to endure, not only to escape the deterrents to happy, healthy living, but more importantly to give our undivided attention to where we are in the universe. Determined to be who we have become, we get to live out our days caught up in something cosmic, something

larger than life itself, larger than our breathing and dying, all things penultimate, sharing a love that will never die. When death and disorder would stare us into the ground, Jesus reminds us that ultimately “not a hair of your head will perish” (v. 18), we move forward, ever embracing the end, ministers and servants of Jesus Christ to one another, to the world community, to the entire created order, as we are in this cosmic enterprise together, to further in large or small ways what is not yet, an already that is at work within us and among us, always to be completed.