

“Mayday, mayday, mayday. This is the *Alaska Ranger*...We are flooding, taking on water in our rudder room.” It was 2:52 am, March 23, 2008 – Easter morning, when Coast Guard Station Kodiak picked up the distress call from a point 800 miles west, in Alaska’s frigid Bering Sea. “Roger. Good copy on position. Request to know number onboard.” After a static-filled pause, the answer came through loud and clear: “*Number of persons: 47.*”

The *Alaska Ranger* (**picture**), a fishing ship, was sinking. For any hope of survival the crew needed to abandon ship in the middle of the night into the frigid waters of the Bering Sea. Radio pleas for help were forwarded to a Coast Guard ship which moved toward the area while dispatching helicopters. By the end of the rescue, 42 of the 47-person crew were rescued. For the Coast Guard it was the largest cold-water rescue in its history.

Semper Paratus, *Always Ready*. It’s the motto of the U.S. Coast Guard. It’s Latin for *Always Ready*. One could write **Semper Paratus** over Luke 21.

Jesus urges His followers to be ready. Turn to Luke 21:5-25 (p. 880). This is the Gospel of Luke’s version of what’s known as the Olivet Discourse. It’s important and found in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke).

To understand this passage, we need bifocals. Bifocals help you see near and far, depending on how you’re looking. In Luke 21, Jesus is teaching about events that are very near to His day and would take place within forty years. Yet, He’s also teaching about the very distant future, His Second Coming and the end of human history.

Because of the complexity of the *near* and *far*, it’s a difficult passage. New Testament scholar, Earle Ellis (**picture**), noted that the Olivet Discourse “*has been the subject of more scholarly debate than perhaps any other passage in the Gospels.*” Christians have debated about what’s *near* and what’s *far* almost since the beginning. It’s part of what’s known as *Eschatology*, the study of last things. It includes Christ’s return, when He’ll return, and what the world will be like in the days preceding His Second Coming. Before we dig into Luke 21, it may help to explain these different viewpoints. There are **three views** on the millennium.

The Postmillennial View: The Millennium, a term meaning “thousand,” refers to the 1,000 year reign of Christ. It’s only mentioned in Revelation 20.

Postmillennialists believe the millennium is an era during which Christ will reign over the earth, not from a literal or earthly throne, but through the gradual increase of the gospel and its power to change lives. After this gradual Christianization of the world, Jesus will return and usher the Church into their eternal state after judging the wicked. It’s called postmillennialism because Christ will return after the millennium.

The Amillennial View: Amillennialists interpret Christ’s millennial reign in a spiritual sense. They reject a literal thousand-year reign on earth. Israel and the Church are viewed as forming one people of God. Kingdom promises to Israel apply now to the Church and the Church Age.

The Premillennial View: Premillennialists believe in Christ’s literal return before the Millennium and that He’ll reign on earth for a literal thousand years. Most believe that New Testament believers, the Church, will be “raptured” prior to a 7 year tribulation. Following the tribulation, Christ will return to establish a 1,000 year millennial kingdom. That kingdom ends with a final, futile rebellion by Satan and the forces of evil. That’s followed by the final judgment and the beginning of the eternal reign.

Personally, I’m a Premillennialist and it’s the position of our church. Premillennialism takes a literal approach to the interpretation of Scripture. Obviously, there are parts which are symbolic, like Revelation or Ezekiel, but they’re obviously symbolic. To me, it’s a better view of interpretation.

None of this is a question of orthodoxy or salvation. Godly Christians differ on these matters. Charles Spurgeon (**picture**) was an Amillennialist. Our view of prophecy must not be a point of division. The study of God’s Word demands humility and a willingness to admit that we don’t have all of the answers. Our foundation is the gospel. We’re united on the gospel. We’re also not to set dates or obsess about “signs” which seem to indicate the end.

Jesus’ main point and our focus today is *Be Ready!* It’s the question we each must answer: *Am I ready? Am I ready to stand before Jesus?*

Be Ready because nothing in this world lasts. My brother, Mark, used to work in the New York City garment district. When I was in college, I visited him and wandered around New York City. I still remember wandering around the street level area of the World Trade Center.

Can you imagine someone prophesying on September 10, 2001 that the Twin Towers (**picture**) would come crashing down within 24 hours? Jesus does that about the temple. He’s prophesying the coming destruction of the greatest building in Israel, the most beautiful building in their country.

His disciples are marveling over the temple's (**picture**) beauty and discussing the wonder of it. It was 4 football fields wide and 5 football fields long. Made of marble so pure, it looked like a mountain of snow from a distance. One wall was solid gold and was blinding in the sunlight. There were single columns of marble 40 feet high. Some foundation stones were the size of railway boxcars and weighed 100 tons. It was breathtaking and one of the great wonders of the ancient world.

Most people in Jesus' day lived in houses of mud or stone. A high spot of their regular visits to Jerusalem was to check out the progress of the construction of the temple. It'd be like visiting New York City to see the Statue of Liberty, or the Taj Mahal in India. The destruction of the temple was unthinkable and barbaric. It'd been under construction for 43 years and wouldn't be completed until 63 A.D. Yet, Jesus predicts it will all be destroyed. That would happen just seven years after it was finally completed.

The temple occupied the central place in Jewish national life and religion. It's destruction was unthinkable for devout Jews. It was designed by God for His people to meet Him there, but in Jesus' day, it had become a sham. God always judges false worship.

What's truly amazing is that the disciples believed Jesus. They only want to know when it's going to happen. Jesus isn't interested in date setting, but instead warns them to be prepared. His warnings are for us too. Nothing in this world lasts. Jesus is coming back. Eternity is the real world. As D.L. Moody (**picture**) said, *"The moment a man realizes that Jesus Christ is coming back again to receive His followers to Himself, this world loses its hold upon him. Gas stocks and water stocks and stocks in banks and railroads are very much less consequence to him then. His heart is free, and he looks for the blessed appearing of the Lord, who, at His coming, will take him into His blessed kingdom."*

So, what's the worst thing you can imagine that could ever happen to America? That's the feeling of shock Jesus' disciples felt at the thought of the destruction of the temple. No wonder they wanted to know when. They wanted to have some kind of warning before that horrible day. But Jesus doesn't answer their questions. Instead He warns them...

Don't be deceived. *"And He said, 'See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them."* A freshman at Eagle Rock Junior High won 1st prize at the greater Idaho Falls Science Fair. He demonstrated how conditioned we've become to alarmists practicing junk science and spreading fear. In his science project he urged people to sign a petition demanding strict control or total elimination of the chemical "dihydrogen monoxide." And for good reasons, since it: *Can cause excessive sweating and vomiting. Is a major component in acid rain. Can cause severe burns in its gaseous state. Accidental inhalation can kill you. It decreases effectiveness of car brakes.*

He asked 50 people if they supported a ban of this chemical. 43 said yes, 6 were undecided, and only one knew that the chemical was H₂O (water). The title of his prize winning project was, "How Gullible Are We?"

Christians can be gullible. Jesus warns us to not be deceived. Just because some preacher says it or it's a bestseller, it doesn't mean it's true. Anyone can quote Scripture out of context and make it sound right.

Many false messiahs rose up in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. Many Christians are enticed by the sensational. Instead we must master the basics of Scripture. In each generation there are deceivers who claim to speak on God's behalf. Satan is the great counterfeiter.

Deception cloaks itself in a pseudo-spirituality. Here are some symptoms to be wary of: *When doctrine or personal Bible study isn't valued. Personal interpretations are held to an equal or higher view than biblical truth. Believers are discouraged from studying or growing intellectually. Questions are discouraged. Outsiders are viewed with skepticism. Evangelism is avoided. There's an arrogant, critical spirit or a tendency to go off on tangents. Authenticity and transparency are avoided. The church is hyper-independent and focused on Empire building, rather than a Kingdom vision.*

God designed the local church to help us stay balanced. It's His plan for this age. It's why Satan wants us to devalue the local church.

Let me illustrate. One of my favorite hymns is, *It is well with my soul* by H. G. Spafford (**picture**). Yet, toward the end of his life, Spafford went off the deep end. He ended his days leading his family and followers to live in Jerusalem believing that he was the second Messiah. What we believe must always line up with the truth of God's Word. **Don't be deceived.**

Don't be terrified. *"And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." 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 pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."* Did you catch that? *Do not be terrified.*

Last Sunday in our Grace group and *Emojis* study, we studied fear. Fear is from the Fall, not God. God doesn't want us to live in fear. So, do you live in fear? If you do, it's not from God!

There have always been wars. In the last 3500 years of recorded history, only 268 have been free of war. That's not taking into account unrecorded history. Historian, Will Durant (**picture**) wrote, "*War is one of the constants of history, and has not diminished with civilization and democracy.*"

There have always been earthquakes, famines and plagues. Some Christians are wringing their hands over global warming. It's not the way it all ends. Please understand, based on the Creative Mandate of Genesis 1:28, we must be biblical environmentalists and take care of this earth which God has entrusted to us. The sky though is not falling, nor is it melting.

Notice that there's a governmental element...*nation, kingdom.* It's a sin for American Christians to wring their hands over politics. Many of us are far too politically focused. Jesus commanded us to be Kingdom focused.

Do I want our country to become a socialist one? No, and I'll do what I can to keep us a Constitutional Republic. It's a sin though to fret or be enraged about what's taking place on the political stage. Personally, I don't want to stand at the Bema and have to apologize to a believer from Iran or North Korea for getting all worked up over American politics when in their country, they're giving their lives for the gospel! That leads us to...

2. Be Ready to share the gospel. Look at verses 12-19. We need verse 14 tattooed on our hearts, "***This will be your opportunity to bear witness.***"

Are you ready? Please share your faith. If we can talk about the weather, shouldn't we be able to talk about the Creator of the weather? If we can talk about politics, shouldn't we be able to talk about the King of Kings? If we can talk about sports, shouldn't we be able to talk about how someone can be on God's squad for all eternity? If we can talk about our job, shouldn't we be able to talk about One who gave us our ability and everything we have?

Let me give you a simple way to build a gospel bridge – invite someone to attend church with you and to lunch afterwards. Talk about the service with them. Even if they turn you down, you've opened a door and built a bridge.

Something that I do that I learned from my friend, John Draper, is that when we're out to eat, I tell the server we're going to pray over our food and ask if there is something that they'd like us to pray about for them. But if you do that, make sure that you leave a big tip.

Last week when we were in Michigan for Dad Quick's funeral, we drove by a man whose car was stuck in the snow. Ben and I popped out and tried to help, but couldn't get him unstuck. It was freezing and he didn't have any gloves, so I offered to give him mine. He turned me down but as we drove off, I remembered I had a second pair. I turned around, gave him the gloves and gave him a gospel tract. I don't believe in *accidents*. I believe in divine *appointments*. God is bringing lost people into your life for you to share the gospel with. ***Be ready!*** The gospel is the hope this dying world needs.

Persecution is normal for the Christian. One reason that it's vital for us to not fear persecution is that it gives us extraordinary opportunities for evangelism. We're to be fearless and seize the opportunity. Most won't die for their faith, yet the word for *martyr* comes from the Greek word, *martus*, which means "witness." If you've trusted Christ, God doesn't expect you to be a theologian. He does require you to be a *witness* of His saving grace.

The word *gospel* means "good news." Jesus commanded us to share the good news of how once our lives were a big mess because of sin, but Jesus died for our sin. We've committed our lives to Him and trusted He died in our place to pay our sin debt, so we could be forgiven. That's the gospel!

"You will be hated by all for my name's sake." Sometimes it's a neighbor or co-worker. Sometimes it's family. A spouse may walk out on a believer. Some in our church have experienced that. The key is that even in the hatefulness, we're to stay Christlike, gracious and loving.

You'll find that there are two types of persecution: *overt* and *covert*. In some parts of the world, it's *overt*. It's out in the open. One Christian who was suffering for his faith wrote to a friend, "*Heads are rolling in the sand; come and add yours.*"

In America, it's usually *covert*. As we stand for biblical morality, it will happen more and more. Though he's since been vindicated, former Atlanta fire chief, Kelvin Cochran (**picture**) was fired for writing a book on his own time that included Bible verses addressing a biblical morality. It cost him his job. It was *covert* persecution. But we can't do this in our own strength...

The words we need will be provided by God. "*This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.*" This isn't an excuse for laziness in preaching or teaching. We're to faithfully prepare and study the Word of God. What it's talking about is that when we don't know what to say for the sake of the gospel, God will give us the right words.

Luke's second book, the book of Acts, the history of the early church has account after account of that. Many a Christian has had the experience of being in a situation that's overwhelming and intimidating, and God wonderfully provided the right words at the right time.

God doesn't expect us to be clever or articulate, we must though be faithful. We can be confident that God will help us, that Jesus really is enough. Too often Christians hesitate to share the gospel for fear of saying the wrong thing. Can't we trust that God will give us the right words and that even if, humanly speaking, we blow it – God can overrule and use it?

The grace we need to endure will be provided by God. *“But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”* Is this a promise for balding Christians? No, it means that God's grace is sufficient. It's the fulfillment of Romans 8:38-39, *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

This isn't physical protection. It's something much greater, spiritual protection. Our endurance or what's known as perseverance shows that we truly have a relationship with Christ. In other words, when the heat is on, it reveals who is real and has a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

It means we're never alone even in the midst of the fire. It's the courage of a Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego found in Daniel 3. King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to execute them by throwing them into a fiery furnace if they wouldn't bow down to his image. *“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”* And God wonderfully rescued them, but He doesn't always rescue us.

God may give you a smooth course or He may use you to glorify Him as He has with so many throughout Church History to suffer for His name. It may be a mixture of both. Yet, whatever you face, His grace is enough.

The time to determine to be faithful is not when you're being threatened with a fiery furnace. Make that commitment now so that whatever happens, you'll persevere. Two things are promised in this passage: future *suffering* and future *victory*. The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Many don't finish well. It's why we must pray that we finish well. As Robertson McQuilkin (**picture**) wrote:

*That I should end before I finish or
finish, but not well.*

*That I should stain Your honor, shame Your name,
grieve Your loving heart.*

Few, they tell me, finish well . . .

Lord, let me get home before dark.

3. Be Ready because God's Word is always fulfilled, verses 20-24. Can you imagine 50 years from now Washington D.C. being nuked? In less than 50 years the very place Jesus was standing as He spoke these words was obliterated by the Roman Army. God's Word is always fulfilled.

Back then, you fled to a city for protection. Jesus said that was the most dangerous place to go. Christians believed His words. When Rome sent their first armies to attack Jerusalem, believers fled and survived.

Jerusalem and the temple were finally totally destroyed. Jewish historian, Josephus (**picture**) records that over a million Jews were killed with another 100,000 taken prisoner. The most vulnerable pay the highest price, like women and children. The devastation was horrible! When the Romans left, not a single Jew was left alive in the City and no Jew was allowed to live there again for many years.

Israel rejected Jesus and rebelled against God. When they cried out to Pilate to crucify Jesus, they said, *“His blood be on us and on our children!”* And it was. While God is patient, He's always just.

If we don't run to the cross, ultimately we'll face judgement. Jesus went to the cross and took God's wrath for us, so we don't have to face judgement.

God's judgments come in two forms: *temporal* and *eternal*. When God's temporal judgment falls on a people, everyone suffers. If God's temporal judgment falls on America, we all will suffer. His temporal judgments are a warning of the far worse eternal judgment that's coming on the whole earth.

The Apostle John describes *“a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them”* (Rev. 20:11). Israel came under God's temporal judgment because she rejected the Savior. Even so, every person who rejects Christ will face the eternal wrath of God.

Just because for almost 2,000 years Christ has not yet returned to judge the earth doesn't mean that He won't do so in the future. His warning is clear: He's coming back in power and great glory, but then it will be too late for those who've rejected Him.

Today, Israel, God's chosen people have been set aside. It's *“the times of the Gentiles”* and will continue until the 2nd Coming. But the last page hasn't been written. We must **Be Ready because God's Word is always fulfilled.**

Conclusion: A young lady busied herself getting ready for a blind date. This wasn't just dinner and a movie; her date had planned dinner at an exclusive restaurant with live music and dancing. Wanting to make a good first impression, she'd even taken the day off work. She cleaned her apartment. She went out that afternoon to have her hair done and to get a manicure. When she got home she did her makeup, put on her best dress and was ready for her date's arrival. His expected arrival came and went, but she continued to wait patiently. Finally, after waiting over an hour she decided she'd been stood up. She took off her dress, let down her hair, put on her pajamas, gathered her favorite junk food and sat down to watch TV with her dog.

Sometime later there was a knock at the door; it was her date. He looked at her surprised and said, "*What! I gave you an extra two hours and you're still not ready to go!*"

Semper Paratus. The Coast Guard is *Always Ready*. Are you *Always Ready*? If Jesus came back today, would you be ready to meet Him? Would you be able to greet the King of Kings in faith, knowing that you've trusted Him and been redeemed by placing your faith in Him?

Maybe you've trusted Him, but you're not ready. You're backslidden. There's known sin in your life. You've grown slothful in your Christian walk. Please come back to Him today, repent and return to the right path. He wants to forgive and restore you.

Then, what about those that you care most about? What have you done to see that they're prepared to meet the King? Have you shared the gospel with them?

God always keeps His Word. Jesus is coming back. Are you ready?