

Title: Patient Endurance

Subtitle: Having hope when there seems to be no hope requires patient endurance.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/GBLa2kQ0BNI>

In today's Gospel, Jesus startles his disciples with end-time predictions. The context reveals that the disciples had been marveling at the beauty of the Temple with its marvelous stones. The enormous size of the blocks of stone with which the Temple of Jerusalem was built exceeded most of the wonders of the ancient world. Most that were above ground were between 2 and 5 tons. But archaeologists have uncovered that some of the foundation stones used were as large as 44.6' long X 11' high X 16.6', which weighed between 570 and 640 tons.¹ According to Josephus, it took 1000 oxen to help set these stones in place. The famous historian, Josephus, mentioned that when the son of the Roman Emperor, Titus Caesar, the commander of the Roman army who sacked Jerusalem, saw how large these stones were, he was struck with wonder.

Therefore, it should not be a surprise that this Temple was a symbol of permanence, national strength, and wealth.² Yet, as unbelievable as Jesus' prediction seemed at the time, it was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the Temple. Some have speculated that when the Temple was set on fire, the gold with which the Temple was adorned, melted, and flowed between these vast stones, gave rise to the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction that ***“the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”***³

¹ Biblical Archaeological Review, 15.6 November/December 1989

² Pulpit Commentary on St. Luke, Volume 2, page 183, comment paraphrased

³ Luke 21:6

That prediction referred to the stones which could be seen above ground. The stones that made up the foundation for the temple mound, known today as the wailing wall, remained untouched.

But this is just one of the hundreds of Biblical predictions that have been fulfilled. And if this is true that we should take to heart the admonition in our opening prayer, which reads, *“Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ.”*⁴ This is the only collect prayer that stresses the importance of reading the scriptures. The prophetic insight that is contained is one of the ways that God (who is outside of time) breaks through the walls of time to address us. When he speaks, we should read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what is said. Therefore when Jesus predicts that *“there will be wars and instability (due to revolution and anarchy), do not be terrified, for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”*⁵ Then Jesus mentions *“earthquakes in various places, famines, and pestilences, along with terrors and signs from heaven.”*⁶ These predictions were not given to terrify us. They were written for our learning so that we might be better prepared to handle hard times.

One of the common descriptions of false prophets in the Bible was their tendency to only predict positive things, along with only proclaiming only those things which people longed to hear. Their message reminds me of the olds of the old cowboy song, “Home on the Range.” Its lyrics go, “Where never is heard

⁴ BCP, Collect for Proper 28, p. 236

⁵ Luke 21:9

⁶ Luke 21:10-12

a discouraging word, and the sky is not cloudy all day. The song may evoke nostalgic feelings, but it is not true to life.

On the other hand, true prophets dealt with the harsh realities of living in a fallen world, with all of the heartbreaking consequences of humankind's sinfulness. Yet, even when the righteous suffer along with the unrighteous, the people of God were told not to fear, for, in patient endurance, you will gain your souls. The verb for endurance is in the perfect tense, which always involves the idea of "acquiring" rather than "possessing."⁷

Part of what is meant by this "possessing" includes the wisdom and knowledge of God that imparts strength and courage. God does not want us to be uninformed about the times that are upon us. Ignorance and a lack of information lead to anxiety and weakness. God has given us the scriptures so that we will be prepared and equipped for every good work, regardless of adverse circumstances. When days are dark, the light has a more excellent opportunity to shine.

This insight has been hammered out in the lives of believers in every generation. It has also been evident in the history of our nation, which we commemorated this past Friday on Veterans Day.

My dad, a WWII vet, said that when the bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred, many of his peers thought the end of the world was about to happen. They saw the Anti-Christ reigning over Europe and that the end might soon be near. For all they knew, they were spitting against the wind in a war that seemed unwinnable. But they persevered in doing what they believed was right, even if it meant a high cost to human life. And for us, it is another example of the appeal we are given in our gospel

⁷ Ellicott's Commentary on the Greek word "endurance" used in Luke 21:19

today, which concludes, ***“By your endurance, you will gain your souls.”***⁸

Even Hollywood has given us examples of how to live during stressful times when it produced a group of disaster movies made during the 1970s. As you might remember, their names were *Towering Inferno*, *Earthquake*, and *The Poseidon Adventure*. The storyline follows the same basic plot: A sudden and catastrophic event occurs, leaving a group of people trying to find a way to safety. Unfortunately, some are so traumatized by the event that they cannot help themselves or others. But the ones who succeed are those who form a team – a vital community – to solve their overwhelming difficulties. And to me, it sounds like they took their cue right out of the Book of Acts, where the Church came together when it was being mocked and persecuted. They prayed and found the boldness and strength to face adverse times.

The more recent versions of these apocalyptic movies are *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon*, which seem to rely on a selfless messianic figure willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of humanity. Similarly, The days we are facing require not only sacrifice but spiritual wisdom and discernment. With every disaster, there will be an opportunity to let our light shine in the darkness. For example, the early Church grew when there were plagues because it gave them a chance to serve the sick and dying when others, out of fear of dying, would not do so. They did this because the love of Christ constrained them to help others who could not help themselves. And in doing so, they were able to “fix their eyes not on what is seen, but on what is

⁸ Luke 21:19

unseen since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”⁹

I will never forget the devastation I experienced with Hurricane Katrina. But it spurred me on to trust God like never before. And to my surprise, the Lord opened doors I never dreamed of. It blows my mind when I look back and consider how God took adverse circumstances and used them for my greater good.

So when trouble is predicted or actually comes our way, let us “*...not be weary in doing what is right,*”¹⁰ for if we endure, we will ultimately gain our life and win the prize of the heavenly call of God that is ours in Christ Jesus.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:18

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:24