

Saturday, December 6, 2014

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Scripture

Luke 21:5-19;

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 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.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Devotional

“*Comfort* one another with these words” (1 Thes 4:18)? Apocalyptic passages like these seem anything *but* comforting. Indeed, end-time visions are often used like bogeymen, to frighten people into the kingdom: “These are the last days! The Rapture could happen at any moment! Are *you* ready?”

The apocalyptic perspective on the future is not optimistic, but hard-headedly realistic, grounded in the experience of human cruelty (see Luke 21:5-19). Yet, ultimately, the future is not in the hands of emperors, or generals, or oligarchs. The future is God’s, and God will bring in God’s reign. Therefore Paul is certain that the “dead in Christ” will not be forgotten. They, together with those “who are alive,” will be caught up in a joyful throng, meeting Christ in the air to welcome him as he returns to reign. This Advent, may we like Paul claim this promise, and “comfort one another with these words.”

Prayer

O Lord of past, present, and future, in your love no one is forgotten, and nothing beautiful is lost. May we then confidently entrust into your hands our own lives, and the lives of those whom we love. Grant us the assurance that those who have gone before us, and our children and grandchildren after us, are alike held securely in your love. Challenge us to live in the present with the confident assurance that your kingdom is coming—and is, indeed, already in our midst. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.