

## “Faith is Persecution and Promise”

### **Scripture: Luke 21:5-19**

Graphic: trials, persecution, promise

Key Verses: 21:13 This will give you an opportunity to testify...21:19 By your endurance you will gain your souls.

Theme: Sometimes, life can get pretty rough, chaotic, or scary. These times are opportunities to testify about what God has done, is doing, and will do. And by our endurance through the persecution, will we live into God's promises.

### **1) Introduction**

- a) Over the last few weeks, you've probably picked up on the fact that the book of Luke is REALLY concerned about your faith...and so is your pastor.
- b) The text asks us questions like: Do you have faith, even the size of a mustard seed? Does your faith result in gratitude? Is your faith humble and repentant? Are you willing to respond to Jesus because of your faith? Do you have faith in the resurrection from the dead? Do you have faith in Jesus?
- c) Basically, Luke is asking us to stop sitting on the fence of faith and get into the game...to make a decision to be a faithful, growing, grateful, hopeful follower of Jesus Christ who make an impact on God's kingdom.
- d) And even as Luke is telling us to put our faith in Jesus, to follow Jesus, he's painting that picture on the backdrop of a Messiah Jesus that is heading very quickly to his own personal destruction. It's like, "I want everyone to follow Jesus! And when you DO THAT, you'll get the same thing HE got." And what is that? "He got murdered." Great! "BUT (as we learned last week), he didn't stay dead...in fact he was raised from the dead and will live FOREVER!" And the pattern that Jesus goes through - the pattern we go through - is one of persecution and promise. For every trial and every fear in the name of Jesus, God has a promise. For every temporal suffering in Jesus' name, there is a timeless promise of something better.
- e) And Jesus didn't get the promise without the persecution and neither do we.
- f) At this point in the narrative, today from Luke 21, Jesus is just days (hours, even!) away from dying on that cross. And, as a result, his focus has shifted from teaching about the here-and-now, to preparing the disciples for the world they would be living in after he'd risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. About OUR world...OUR lives...this is about US.

- g) And Jesus, staring at a gruesome cross, thought not of himself but of those who'd be taking up their crosses after him...the disciples...you and me.
- h) Let's turn in our Bibles to Luke chapter 21, verse 5...
- i) Let's pray...

## 2) Scripture

### a) Read verses 21:5-6

- i) Some people, Mark tells us that it was the disciples who were doing this, were walking in the Temple, literally gawking at the Temple and all its adorned beauty. It's like the NYC effect. Did you ever see that? Maybe experience it yourself? People new to NYC literally walk around with their eyes up, mouth open, gawking at the height of the buildings and the lights. (Incidentally, that's how thieves know who is vulnerable to pick-pocketing).
- ii) The disciples had taken a moment to marvel at the temple, which Herod was rebuilding. And for good reason!
- iii) Historians such as Tacitus and Josephus tell us it was indeed impressive, made of massive stones and decorated with large monetary gifts from foreign countries, with doors and gates of the finest craftsmanship.
- iv) But Jesus interrupts the disciples' downright infatuation with the man-made beauty of the temple by boldly stating that a time was coming when this temple towering over them would come crashing to the ground.
- v) It sounded absurd at the time. Imagine standing in Washington, D.C. and waving in the direction of the Lincoln Memorial, saying, "The day is coming when not one stone, statue, writing, or pillar will remain standing." It's absurd, right?
- vi) And not only was Jesus talking about the physical Temple, which in 70 A.D. DID come crashing down, but he was talking about the fact that when He goes to the cross, and rises again, the wayward religious establishment that is symbolized by this Temple, would also come crashing down...would be THROWN DOWN by God through him.
- vii) This was a shocking statement! "What? This HUGE building will fall down? No way!" Verse 7...

**b) Read verses 21:7-8**

- i) December 22, 2012. Anyone one the significance of that date?
- ii) That date is believed to be the end of the world, based on the Ancient Mayan calendar that began in 3114 B.C. and is predicted to mark the very END of the world on that date in 2012. Enjoy this last year of Christmas shopping, I guess...
- iii) Jesus said, "Beware that you are not led astray!" "Others will say, 'I am he!,' and, 'The time is near.'
- iv) Nonsense, says Jesus! Silliness and hogwash! Could it be? Sure...just as much as any other day. Should we care? Heck no! You know why? Because I want to be so busy raking people into the kingdom of heaven that when the world ends and Jesus returns, I want to be busy doing His work...preaching His gospel...loving His people.
- v) We don't CARE about the myth of December 22, 2012 or any other date. Christ calls us to care about Him...and instead of worrying about the end of the world, we should be worrying whether or not if we're giving glory and honor to God today by our whole lives!
- vi) Even though the disciples wanted to have a time – they wanted a sign – of when this Temple destruction would take place, Jesus answers their question with a warning...
- vii) And it's a warning against being distracted from the real purpose to which he has called them...to repent and believe...to go and tell...
- viii) Because time IS short...and the world IS falling apart.
- ix) Listen to what Jesus says will happen...

**c) Read verses 21:9-11**

- i) Note the key to those verses is: do not be terrified!
- ii) "A time of judgment is just around the corner," he says. "It will be a time when the earth itself starts freaking out with earthquakes and famines. There will be struggles between nations, the fall of great powers and even persecution for those following me. It's coming. So here's the first round of persecution in our persecution-promise cycle...world chaos.

- iii) But even so (and here's the first promise from God), **DO NOT NEED AFRAID!** God has not forgotten what he told us... Christ is right now still ushering in His kingdom...it will be in **HIS** time.
- iv) Persecution – promise. World is chaos – God still in control.
- v) And we have to be ready for that future reality now...
- vi) Why? Because in the meantime we, as his followers, have a job to do, and because he tells us things are going to get really bad before they get really good.
- vii) And as if world disaster and war and famine and plagues weren't bad enough, Jesus turns directly at the disciples and delivers some even **WORSE NEWS**. The second wave of persecution in our lives...

**d) Read verses 21:12-13**

- i) Here's the persecution – you will be arrested, persecuted, jailed, handed over, examined by authorities and kings...
- ii) In the book of Acts, the disciples were repeatedly subject to abuse, trial, and mocking. They were told to shut up, leave, and never come back.
- iii) There's a great story of the apostle Paul in Acts 14:19-20. He was stoned up to an inch of his death and dragged out of the city. The apostles all thought he was dead. But, it says, when the disciples surrounded him, he **GOT UP** and went **BACK** into the city. He wasn't finished. The persecution didn't finish him because he **BELIEVED**...he had faith...in the promise that god would give him and opportunity to witness about Jesus...to testify about the Christ who saved him.
- iv) The persecution – the arrests and martyrdoms – led directly to even **MORE** opportunities for witnessing. It's like, bring it on...I can't wait to be persecuted, right?
- v) Maybe not, but, you know, the most powerful testimonies of people I know come from those who have been through unbelievable hardship and who stand firm in their conviction that it was God who brought them through.
- vi) I stand in awe of those in this church who testify in the face of unbearable pain. Sometimes persecution comes simply because we are

Christians and claim it publically. Other times, persecution comes from the forces of evil seeking to destroy us. Either way, if we forget whose we are in the midst of our struggle, then we've wasted the God-given opportunity to give Him the glory and honor.

- vii) And it doesn't happen overnight...we sometimes stay angry at God for long periods of time...we hold onto bitterness and fear...
- viii) You know what I say us today? Go for it! Be angry at God...you're not the first one. Just don't stay there because if you are subject to the persecution without hearing the promise, you're focusing on the temporal and not the timeless.
- ix) Missing the opportunity to show your opponents the truth about you...that the eternal life you have comes directly from God, in spite of the persecution.
- x) And...verse 14...

**e) Read verses 21:14-15**

- i) Promise number 3 – when faced with personal persecution, rely on God. Jesus tells his disciples to enter into the persecution knowing that God will provide the words to say to testify. We don't have to be Christians that have memorized some canned formula for witnessing.
- ii) It helps to practice and to be ready...but take your cues from God. If you feel god moving you to pray with someone, even an enemy or stanger, do it! He'll GIVE you the words to say...
- iii) Again in Acts, the apostles repeatedly spend time talking to people who are skeptical and who would end up wanting to hurt them because of what they are saying...they just shut their ears and went, "nah, nah, nah, I can't hear you" and got angry. And each time, the Holy Spirit comes and washes over the crowd and "many, many, people" are added to their numbers daily. But it didn't end the persecution, because God has more promises...
- iv) Let's look at the last set...

**f) Read verses 21:16-19**

- i) Not only will you have to face world chaos, and be mocked and put to trial in your community...and not only will people throw you in prison and oppose you...but your OWN FAMILY and FRIENDS will betray you...even YOUR PARENTS will disown you...and they will put some of you to death...
- ii) How many of you are estranged because of your faith in Jesus? How many can't talk about your faith in front of family members because they simply walk away and call you a Jesus freak? How many times have you prayed for a spouse, or brother, or friend who is walking 180 degrees away from God and won't HEAR anymore from you?
- iii) I'm here to tell you it's only going to get worse.
- iv) And for me, this is worst form of persecution because these are the people that LOVE YOU, and you LOVE. These are the people that KNOW you...
- v) Jesus says that in the last days it will be worse...
- vi) But there's a promise...there's something great!
- vii) Not a HAIR ON YOUR HEAD will perish...
- viii) Even something so temporal as the hair on your head (and for some it's already more temporal than timeless, right?)...even THAT, will be not perish because you are faithful.
- ix) And by your endurance, you will gain your soul...by your perseverance, eternal life – the timeless promise – will be yours.

### **3) Application**

- a) Cycle of persecution and promise (temporal and timeless)! God taking you through the fire and being faithful to you for provision and sustenance until you come out the other side. This is the life we choose when we choose to answer God's call to be kingdom-builders.
- b) And the choice is yours...
- c) If being a participant in the life of this church is exceedingly easy for you, then I would challenge you to examine what God is calling you to that you have not yet answered Him...

- d) I'm not saying that everything we do has to be a struggle or it's not worth it...what I'm saying is that when we get too comfortable with the way things are in life or in the church, the opportunity arises for Satan to keep us there and hold us back from impacting the world for the kingdom.
- e) I'm also not saying that we should go out and find trouble. Although I tend to do that from time to time...
- f) Jesus merely told his disciples that they could expect persecution, hardship, trials, pain, suffering, and death, because of His name...
- g) Just the name of Jesus causes trouble for us...we don't need to look for it!
- h) Simply by mentioning His name!
- i) So how do we make it through today? How do we endure the temporal persecution so we can claim the timeless promise?
- j) Three things...
- k) First, let's expand our world by opening up our eyes a little wider. Let's look around us to find opportunities to engage our community in meaningful and transformational ways. Our Food Pantry is moving in that direction...I'll challenge us to tell more of the people that come about Jesus. But what are the other opportunities? Don't settle for what we've always done...let's go OUT and find the lost and the hurting...
- l) Second, when struggles do arise in this life, let's pray not just for them to end but pray for the grace and strength to endure them well.
- m) Let's have the maturity and awareness to know that many times, but especially in these closing, end times, God will bring himself glory and give others opportunity to draw close to the truth of Christ not in our avoidance of struggles but through the witness provided by our endurance of them (1 Peter 3:15). Most of the time, this is a matter of perspective...
- n) Let's walk together...
- o) Last, while we keep our eyes on what's happening in the world, let our hearts be focused on what God's Word promises. Specifically, that we will GET those opportunities to testify...God will GIVE us what we need to say when we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit...and we REMEMBER that "not

a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls”  
(Luke 21:18-19).

#### **4) Conclusion**

- a) Sitting on the fence is not an option...
- b) When life gets difficult...decisions get hard...relationships get messy...when persecution comes: those are the times when Satan looks for the people on the fence.
- c) Not because he's afraid that they will be a force that has the potential to block him, but because he knows that those people don't have the support of brothers and sisters in Christ to help shield and strengthen them.
- d) He also knows that it wouldn't take much to knock them off the fence into a culture that is lost and broken.
- e) Bad times are coming, Jesus says. But God's promises are solid.
- f) For followers of Jesus, persecution is coming...it is here. Yet God's promises are still there...
- g) And none is more hopeful than the promise of eternal life...
- h) Let me remind you of the words to Isaiah 12:2, “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.”
- i) This morning, as I pray, I invite you to join hands with the person next to you...we are not in this alone, but walk with the brothers and sisters in faith that are with us...trusting together...working together...loving together...and living into God's promises together.
- j) Let's pray...