

Watchful, Prayerful Saints, Part 2

Luke 21:34-38

Let's start reading Luke 21, starting in verse 29. "Then he told them a parable," but then, refers back to what he just told them about the signs in the sun, moon, stars, the powers of the heavens shaken; all these signs, and then the coming of the Son of Man in a cloud with power and great glory. And after that, "then he told them a parable: 'Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, and you see it for yourselves, know that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. But be on guard so that your hearts will not be overcome with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will," come upon on all. "come upon all those who inhabit the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying earnestly that you may have strength

to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” And thus ends Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse. So much to consider in this section, isn't there?

Why should we watch? Because those who are self-indulgent and self-dependent are dull and deaded, deadened, weighed down, distracted, and in that dull state, they are not going to see what's coming. Again, verse 34, “Be on your guard, so your hearts will not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life.” And then this, “and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who inhabit the face of all the earth.”

It will come. What will come? “The day, suddenly like a trap; that will come on all those who inhabit the face of all the earth.” Why watch? Because watchfulness over the heart is what characterizes every true believer, and it's how God preserves his saints faithful to the end. This is how the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints happens.

Set a watch over your heart. You will never be caught off guard, never taken by surprise. It's the opposite story for the unbeliever. The unbelieving world keeps on indulging the self, lives to please the self. The unbelieving world is self-reliant,

does not trust in a good and kind God, but resorts to, in pride, addled by anxiety, he depends on self to provide for his own needs. He depends on himself to protect himself from danger while pursuing their pleasures.

While tending to the cares and the affairs of everyday life, unbelievers of the world, be, will be so distracted by all those things, they will not see the end coming. "For all who inhabit the face of all the earth." It sounds pretty comprehensive to me. It's universal, it's worldwide. The only exception being the saints who are watching. But for all others, they will be caught, ensnared, trapped in judgement, which this verb speaks of. It happened suddenly and forcibly. It's forced upon them. There'll be no resistance. There will be no Iron Dome to protect. There will be no.

As I read recently in the news, we're putting together some task force to kind of send ships and bombs to blow up any asteroid that might come and destroy the Earth and wipe out all life. There'll be no resisting this. Godet, the commentator says, "The image here is that of a net which, is laying on the ground and, all at once encloses a covey of birds that are peacefully settled in a field." This flock of birds comes and rests and then chirping and biting and squawking and doing

whatever birds do in a field. But they don't know, no idea, they've, they've landed on a net that's hidden in the grasses and then traps them, sudden.

You say, how can that be that they be caught suddenly? Are there not signs popping off like fireworks in the heavens? How can it be? My answer: The Lord says so. First of all, he says they'll be taken by surprise. And that tells me that we fail to understand or appreciate the hardening, deadening power of sin, of self-indulgence and independence, self-reliance that dulls the heart, that blinds the eyes to the obvious.

Look back just a couple of chapters to Luke 17, and just to remind you of teaching that we've already been through, but it's very similar point that Jesus makes in Luke 17. Starting back in verse 22, Luke 17:22, "He said to the disciples, the days will come, when, you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you will not see it. And they'll say to you, 'look there! and look here!' Don't go away," don't, "do not run after them. For just as the lightning when it flashes out of one part of the sky and shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in his day.

"But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. And just as it was in the days of Noah, so it

will be also in the days of the Son of Man. For they were eating and they were drinking, and they were marrying, and they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. And it was the same as in the days of lot. They were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building. But on the day that lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all."

Think about that. Noah's generation heard his preaching for over 120 years while he built the ark. Lot's generation heard his preaching for many years before their judgment came. All that you can read in 2 Peter chapter 2. Noah, the preacher of righteousness, Lot, whose righteous soul was tormented day after day as he saw the ungodly behavior of ungodly men and he called them to account and repent. But just as in the days of Noah and his generation and Lot and his generation, they were self-indulgent, they were self-dependent, their hearts are weighed down, they were dull, they were blind, they missed the obvious. There's an ark sitting there. What is that? They were dull and blind until it was too late.

Peter refers to both those judgments in the days of Noah and the days of Lot, and he speaks of those judgments not just to speak of the judgment coming upon the ungodly, but also to comfort believers by the record of God's salvation. He rescued Noah from the flood. He rescued Lot from the fire, and in the same way, Peter says the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation and keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment. How does he do that? He does that by calling us to watchfulness. Watchfulness.

You turn, if you'd like to, over to 1 Thessalonians 5, just to see this call to watchfulness from a Pauline perspective, to guard our hearts, live obediently to his will. 1 Thessalonians 5:6, "Let us not sleep as others do, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night. Those who get drunk get drunk at night, but since we're of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not appointed us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us."

So that whether we are awake or asleep, we'll live together with him. That is awake when he comes, or have died in Christ when he comes, we'll live together with him and we're to comfort

one another and build one another up with those words. So now that we know what to watch, and we know why to watch, perhaps we're ready to learn, how to watch. Go back to Luke 21, this is verse 36 and notice the opening command, keep on the alert. Jesus is repeating himself, isn't he? It's a similar idea of the verb that begins verse 34, but it's an even more focused verb on watchfulness than that verb in verse 34, *prosechō* is.

If I was to make a distinction between *prosechō*, in verse 34 and this verb, which is *agrypneō*, which starts in verse 36, we could say the distinction is this. If the first verb pictures a guard standing watch, this second verb explains what he's doing in order to stand watch. He's staying awake. The verb *agrypneō*, it literally means to be on the hunt for sleep, which is kind of like a metaphor for sleeplessness. Kind of think of the idea of insomnia. He's staying up, he's staying awake.

It's what Paul spoke of in the passage we just read from Thessalonians. It's, it's not night time for us. It's a time. It's not a time for self-indulgent partying. It's not night time, a time to escape anxieties by sleeping, as the self-dependent do. We don't sleepwalk through life because it's, it's daytime for us. We're wide awake, we're watchful, we're sober minded. So verse 36, keep on the alert at all times, praying

earnestly that you may have strength to escape all these things are about to take place and to stand before the Son of Man.

How do we watch? Just give the bottom line here in the Christian life, watchfulness always accompanied by prayerfulness. Watchfulness accompanied by prayerfulness. Jesus said to his disciples as their eyelids were heavy as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, taking Peter, James, and John with him. He went away from the other disciples and went away from them just a little ways further to pray on his own. He said stay here, keep awake, keep watch while I go over there and pray. Came back, found them sleeping. He said, what, you couldn't watch with me for one hour. Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation. Same thing here.

When we pray, we're praying for strength, Jesus says. Strength for what? Strength to accomplish two things. First, we pray for strength to escape, strength to escape. This is obviously negatively oriented, as we're watchful over our hearts, as we're mortifying any sin that would provoke the wrath of God. We pray that God would keep us diligent to repent from sin and turn from our sin, so we escape the retributive justice that is coming when the Son of Man will return to execute his judgment. And now as believers, we're not praying that prayer in



craven fear, worrying all the time, and wringing our hands that we're only one step away from becoming crushed under the hammer of God's justice.

We trust, don't we, in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, that perfect all sufficient substitutionary atonement that paid the penalty for all of our sins. And yet because of that, we pray in an attitude of filial fear, meaning brotherly or, or family fear, a relational sense. We never want to displease our father in heaven. We don't want to bring any reproach to his name. We never want to, to be identified in any way with the world, because those aren't our people.

God, his church, Christ, his church, those are our people and so we pray for strength to escape all that's coming on the world. This is a call to pray for strength, for self-control; self-control, to handle yourself with self-control, to turn away from temptation, so we don't commit sins. So we pray for strength first to escape. It's negative in its orientation. That's what provokes self-examination, regular self-examination. It provokes the exercise of self-control. It provokes that daily duty of practicing mortification of sin.

Then having done that, second, now, we pray for strength to stand. First strength to escape, negatively oriented, now

strength to stand. And this prayer is positively oriented. First call to prayer is preventative, it's prophylactic. So we have strength to put off anything and everything that offends God; it's called, a self-control. The second aspect of prayer is about self-discipline. Self-control, keeping yourself from what you, in your sin nature, want to do; self-discipline, pushing yourself to do what you don't naturally feel inclined to do in your sin nature. So we need strength for that. Strength to pursue, and to do, and obey, all that pleases God, so we're ready to face him with confidence when he comes.

I've read this before, I'm going to read it again, because it's so precious. John says in 1 John 2:28, "Now little children, abide in Him, so that when He is manifested, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone also who does righteousness has been born of Him." We'll, "see how great a love the Father has given us, so we should be called children of God; and we are. And for this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not been manifested as yet, what we will be. We know that when he is manifested, we'll be like him, because we will see him just as

he is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

We discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. We discipline ourselves for purity, for holiness, to live righteously, to live obediently. Why? So we can stand in confidence at the day of his coming. So we never shrink away, we never cower. We're not ashamed of His coming. Isn't that how you want it to happen? Don't you want it to go down that way? Don't you want his coming to find you doing the things of God and not pursuing your own pursuits, whims, fulfilling your own pleasures? Man, I do. I do.

The next section in 1 John chapter 3 verse 4 to verse 10 starts out, “Everyone who does sin also does lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. He was manifest in order to take away sins. In him there is no sin. No one who abides,” him, “in him continues sinning. No one who has sinned sees him or has come to know him. Little children let no one deceive you. The one who does righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

“But the one who does sin,” isn't just weak, isn't just struggling with issues, isn't just dealing with past hurts, it's, it's not some psychological therapeutic issue. No, “the one who does sin is of the devil because the devils' been

sinning from the beginning, and the Son of God was manifested for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Everyone who's been born of God doesn't sin, because His seed abides in him; he can't sin, because he's been born of God. And this is how the children of God and the children of the devil are manifested; everyone who does not do righteousness is not of God, as well as the one who does not love his brother."

Powerful section. And it's preceded by a call to Christian self-discipline. Who would stand before him, in confidence. Jesus is telling us how to purify ourselves for his coming; how to watch and pray and have confidence when he comes; praying for strength to escape and strength to stand. So we pray for strength to practice self-control, mortify sin, all sinful impulses. We also pray for strength to practice self-discipline, to pursue what is true, and good, and right, and truly beautiful.

Now I admit here at the outset of this final sub point here, this may be a bit forced, but let me add just one more brief point to wrap this up, about how to watch. To be watchful, praying for strength to escape, praying for strength to stand, so the third thing we need to see here, we'll be watchful,

prayerful, when we're devoted to the truth, when we're devoted to the truth.

Take a quick look at the final verses of the chapter. "Now, during the day He was teaching in the temple, but," at the evening he would, "in the evening he would go out and spend the night on the mount that's called Olivet." What Luke is doing in the narrative here, as the narrator, he is connecting us, reconnecting us to where this section started all the way back in Luke 19:47, where Luke told us he was teaching daily in the temple. This is like a bookend. It's called inclusio. If you like the, the fancy word for it; inclusio, just basically bookend.

Here's the start, here's the finish and that kind of joins together a section. That's what Luke's doing here again in, verse, chapter 20, verse 1, he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, that's connected very closely to Luke 19:47. Jesus' teaching was so popular among the common people, not only the residents of Jerusalem and Judea, but also the festive pilgrims who were coming into Jerusalem during this feast time, during the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

He was so popular among the people and his teachings so riveting; the murderous plans of the scribes and Pharisees were thwarted by this popularity. They couldn't get to him without making a scene, without making themselves look like the bad guys that they were. Luke, reminds us about this in verse 38. All the people would get up early in the morning to come to him in the temple and listen to him.

Luke is preparing us here for what's coming, to see the satanically inspired plot of Judas Iscariot, who conspires with the religious leaders to have Jesus arrested, but not in public where everybody can see, where everybody's going to have a big outcry and protest, where a riot will start. No, but to do it secretly. So Luke is preparing us for what's coming in the narrative.

Well, I want us to pause here and reflect on how instructive this is for us. He knows exactly what's going to happen, when it's going to happen. He's anticipating not only great shame, and pain, and suffering, the entire nation turning on him, he's anticipating the very wrath of God poured out on him in his own body as he hangs on a cross. And look how he's spending his time.

If he counted it to be a wise use of time, that his final days, he spends his days in the temple teaching the people. He leaves for rest in the nights on the Mount of Olives. He comes back and he spends all day, of every day, teaching, investing, pouring into people. It's an example for us, isn't it?

He went out at nighttime to Mount Olivet and Luke uses a word, you outdoorsman will like this, he uses a word for camping here. It's inescapable. It's a word that can mean, to lie in an open courtyard, but, or to bivouac, to camp out among the stars. And I, I think it's interesting because we see our Lord camping out underneath the trees and the stars and he's, he's not comfortable. I mean, he's in his 30s.

I remember in my 30s, I even then, I was starting to not like camping at all. Now I abhor it. I mean, we exercise dominion enough to build beds, cushions, pillows, blankets. I really like those things and those who go camping, I don't understand you, but that's what he did, close proximity to the temple. He's not here for his comfort. He's not on vacation.

And in spite of Luke's clarity here, I never fail to find commentators who say that Jesus didn't spend the night on Mount Olivet, but rather they stayed in Bethany, presumably at the home of his friends Lazarus, Martha, Mary, because staying in,

in homes was quite common for pilgrims visiting Jerusalem at feast time. Okay, pardon me for disagreeing, but I have to do so on two counts. First, Luke tells us plainly he did camp out. That's what he says. The second reason being the reason that we discern that he camped out and didn't stay in the home in Bethany. It's not that he loved camping, it's that he loved people and he loved his father.

He loved God and his word and he didn't want any normal hospitality that would take place in the home in Bethany to slow him down. That final cup of coffee, that last croissant or whatever it is, I guess pita bread and hummus in the context. He didn't want anything to slow him down from getting back to his beloved duty. He loved the mission that God sent him to accomplish. With every remaining moment that was left of his life, he wanted to invest it well, invest it wisely, invest it eternally.

So, beloved, knowing and seeing the Lord's love of getting the truth into his people, can you let that encourage you to meet the Lord early in the morning as these people did, that you might match his enthusiasm, to teach you with your own enthusiasm to hear from him, to listen to his teaching, to learn from him.



Beloved, reciprocate. I know it won't be in, in, corresponding measure, but even in some small measure, learn to reciprocate his love for you just by being his disciples, by rejoicing as disciples, as learners, those who are being trained. As the Lord walked with people in the temple complex here before, just days before his death, as he ministered the word of God to them, so that he might draw some into fellowship with him and draw them by fellowship with him into fellowship with his Father.

He was a far cry in that temple complex from the identic garden temple where he walked with Adam and Eve at the beginning, in the cool of the day, to fellowship with them in the beauty of God's creation and the goodness, resting in the goodness of his provision. And what he intended in that garden paradise, now lost, is regained and restored at the very end, isn't it?

We read this earlier. "They showed me a river of the water of life, brightest crystal, coming down from the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of the street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding fruit every month, and the leaves of that tree for the healing of the nations."

No longer be any curse and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his slaves will serve him. They'll see his face; his name will be on their foreheads. No longer be any night. They'll not have any need of the light of a lamp, nor of the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them, and they'll reign forever and ever. Skipping ahead says, "Behold, I'm coming quickly. My reward is with me to render to every man according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the authority to the tree of life, may enter by the gates into the city."

It is the well read, well studied, doctrinally informed Christians who are the most watchful Christians and who are the most prayerful Christians. By reading, studying, learning, we're shaped by the Bible's eschatology and all of its doctrines, our minds being renewed, our habits being changed, our priorities adjusted, our lives transformed, so that we can escape what's coming, but also, more importantly, stand in his presence in confidence at his return.

Let's pray. Our Father. That's what we long for so much, is to stand in confidence and not shy away at all at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I trust that for every single

heart here, there is something that pricks, provokes, stirs, confronts, corrects, encourages, comforts, strengthens, edifies, brings assurance, and hope. And I pray, Father, that you would deploy the Holy Spirit under the shepherding guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ to minister this good word of Luke 21 to every single heart here, that you would visit each one in his or her place of need, that you would minister them in a special way unique to everyone.

For every text, there's one and only one meaning of the text. There's several implications of every meaning of every text. There are a myriad, thousands upon thousands of applications of ways people can put this into practice. Only you know every situation, every heart, every stage of maturity and growth and need. Oh Father, do your good purpose. Lord Jesus, do your, as the Good Shepherd, do your good shepherding work in us, among us.

Holy Spirit, attend to every heart, to convict some of sin, and righteousness, and judgment, and bring them to salvation by faith in Christ and repentance of their sins. And for those who do know Christ, Holy Spirit, please sanctify us in the truth. Please let us live differently as a result of what we've heard today and all these weeks in studying the Olivet Discourse.



Thank you for your work of inspiration that we received a faithful, inerrant, infallible text, one that we can trust. It gives us certainty, and in that certainty, help us to live with an urgency, knowing that the days are short and the time is near. It's in Jesus name we pray, Amen.