

"HOPE FOR THE END TIMES"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

Once there was a man by the name of Luther Gilroy who was out plowing his field. He looked up and saw a sign in the sky that said, "THE END IS NEAR". Later that day, Luther Gilroy let his mule and his cow out of their pens, gave all his chickens away and proceeded to climb to the top of his house and await the end. When it didn't come, he pouted and refused to come down off the roof. Finally, his wife called the local sheriff, who came over and said to him,

"Luther, you idiot. I saw that same sign and it didn't say, 'The end is near' It said, 'Go drink a beer'. Now come down off that roof before you fall down and break your neck."

DEVELOPMENT

From the time of Jesus right down to the present, people have speculated about the end of the world. Over the centuries, people have made their calculations and offered up their predictions, sold or given away their belongings and gathered at the appointed places to wait for the end of the world and for Jesus to return. Obviously, the world has not yet come to an end and Jesus has not yet returned.

Still...we wait. We look around at the world in which we live...filled with violence and crime and racial tension. We read about child abuse, spouse abuse, drug and alcohol abuse and there are those who say,

"Things just can't keep going
on the way they're going..."

Times of uncertainty and crisis always trigger thoughts about the end of time and people always want to know when. Perhaps the Scriptures will shed some light on all of this.

JESUS IN JERUSALEM

Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem for what would turn out to be the last week of His life. They thought that once they got "up" to Jerusalem that some great things would happen and that Jesus would establish His earthly kingdom. Things didn't turn out quite that way. Jesus had upset the religious officials and they were plotting against Him.

It was in this time of confusion that the disciples were admiring the beauty of the great Temple. The Temple had been restored some thirty years before and workers were still completing the detail work. The Temple could be seen from all directions as people approached the great city. The outside of the building was covered with so much gold that an onlooker could scarcely look directly at it in bright sunlight. Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, described the Temple as a sight to behold. Hear his words,

"The Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white."

As the disciples admired the great Temple, Jesus told them,

"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."

"Unthinkable" thought His disciples. "That could never happen". The Temple was built for all generations and it would never be destroyed. Yet Jesus was telling them that one day the beautiful Temple would be nothing but rubble. The disciples went on to ask the question that has been on the lips of just about every generation since then,

"Teacher...when will this be? And what will be the signs that this is about to take place? Tell us!.."

The disciples wanted to know when their world was going to crumble and fall apart. You can't blame them. And Jesus said to them,

"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."

Now I think that Jesus did not want His followers to become too preoccupied with these dark thoughts of the future. He did not want them to be led astray by persons who make meaningless calculations. He did not want them to be paralyzed with fear. And He went on to tell them,

"When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven."

This will be a time of trial, Jesus tells His disciples, and they will not be exempt. But neither will they be alone.

STRENGTH FROM BEYOND

In times of need, Jesus promises them, you will receive strength from beyond. We need to hear that. So put this down then as the first point of this three-pointer. You will receive strength from beyond.

Rabbi Harold Kushner reflects on this strength in one of his books. He writes,

"I have seen weak people become strong, timid people become brave, selfish people become generous. I have seen people care for their elderly parents, for brain-damaged children, for wives in wheelchairs, for years, even decades, and I have often asked myself: where do people get the strength to keep doing that for so long? Where do they get the resources of love and loyalty to keep going?"

The only answer I come up with is when we are weary and out of strength, we turn to God and God renews our strength, so we can run and not be weary, so that we can walk and not feel faint."

In times of persecution, in times of doubt and suffering, in times when our world seems to be crumbling, in times of our greatest need, we will receive strength from beyond ourselves. That strength comes from God. Jesus here is warning His disciples that the days ahead will be tough and they will be difficult, but they are not alone. And neither, my friend, are we!

WE CAN CARRY ON...EVEN WHEN EVERYTHING IS FALLING APART

And because He is with us, we can carry on even when the world around us is falling to pieces.

There were times in the lives of His disciples when everything seemed to go wrong. People rejected their message and some even tried to kill them. There were times when they did their very best and no one responded. Sometimes they were run out of town. Being a follower of Jesus required patience. It called for endurance. It still does.

Bruce E. Olson tells of his experiences as a missionary in South America.

"I got off the plane in Venezuela that hot August day back in 1962 with only seventy-two dollars in my pocket, nineteen years old...alone...unable to speak Spanish, but convinced that the Lord had told me to go to South America and preach to the Indians."

He made some friends among the natives and learned to speak some Spanish. One day a respected colleague asked him if he had ever heard of the Motilone tribe? The friend then described a legendary "stone-age tribe" that had resisted civilization. No one had ever learned their language. Few entering their territory ever came back to tell about it. Bruce felt his heart stir and he penned in his journal,

"I sank back in awe. I knew then and there that those were the people to whom God wanted me to go"

It was no easy task to reach these people. "We chopped our way through the jungle for seven days" he wrote. As they were making their way through the jungle, an arrow pierced his thigh. He fell to the ground. And out of the ferns and trees stepped five squat brown men...their eyes glittering under short-cropped hair. He wrote,

"I had met the Motilones". "They dragged me to my feet and I limped with them to their settlement".

As the days passed, his wounds festered. "I developed amoebic dysentery and began hemorrhaging blood".

But things would get much worse before they got better. He wrote that,

"The period that followed was a nightmare of pain and trial. I continued to try to bring God's love to those people".

For two weeks he lay in a hut...dying. Finally, one of the natives took him to a clearing where he was picked up by a helicopter and taken to a hospital in Maracaibo where he was told it would be six months before he would recover. He could never return to a jungle climate. Bruce wrote,

"But I had a deepening peace in my heart. God had brought me to the Motilones; God would help me to continue. Within three weeks I was back up the river."

Bruce Olson never gave up. He lived with this tribe for four years and he eventually introduced these people to the love of God.

Where does one get the ability to keep going even when everything appears to be going wrong? From God and God alone! In times of need we receive help from beyond. Thus we persevere. We persevere. And this bring us to the final thing I'd would like to lift up.

WE DO NOT SIT BACK AND DO NOTHING WHILE WAITING

Followers of Christ are not to sit back and do

nothing while waiting for Christ's return. While we wait, we have to work. Yes, we have work to do. What kind of work? All kinds of work - loving work, encouraging work. Let me give you one or two examples which, I believe, you will appreciate.

Douglas Maurer, a fifteen year old boy living in Creve Coeur, Missouri, had been feeling bad for several days. With a temperature ranging between 103 and 105 degrees, he showed some flu-like symptoms. His mother, Donna, took him to the Emergency Room of the local hospital where blood tests revealed one of the most agonizing things any parent can learn about a child. Doug was diagnosed as having leukemia.

During the next forty-eight hours, 15 year old Doug received several blood transfusions, spinal and bone marrow tests and chemotherapy. His mother did not leave his room for the next five days. The doctors were quite frank about his disease and his chances. For the next three years he would have to undergo chemotherapy. They also told him he would lose all of his hair, that his body would most likely bloat and upon learning this, Douglas went into depression.

On his second day in the hospital, he said to his mother, "I thought you got flowers when you're in the hospital". One of his aunts called Brix Florist in St. Louis and made arrangements with the sales clerk for a special floral arrangement; she told him about Douglas.

"I want the plant to be especially attractive...you see it's for my teenage nephew who has leukemia". "Oh" said the sales clerk, "Then let's add some fresh-cut flowers to brighten it up".

When the floral arrangement arrived it was beautiful. Douglas opened the envelope and read the card from his aunt. Then he saw another card attached to the flowers which he read. It said,

"Douglas...I'm the person who took your order....I work at Brix Florists. I had leukemia when I was seven years old. I'm 22 now. Good luck. My heart goes out to you. You'll make it. Sincerely, Laura Bradley".

Doug's face lit up and his mother said this,

"For the first time since he had been in the hospital, Doug got some inspiration. He had talked to so many

doctors and nurses. But this one card, from the woman at the florist shop who had survived leukemia, was the THING that made him believe he might beat the disease."

Often in life it is the little extra thing that we do that makes a difference. Loving things. Encouraging things. Whether the world comes to an end today or billions of years from now, we want to be found - NOT sitting on a roof top looking crazily into the sky, BUT ministering faithfully to God's children.

Some of you may have heard of Marva Collins. She's an educator who in 1975 founded the Westside Preparatory School in Chicago. She has nurtured and cherished many children, including three of her own. And she has taken the children under her tutelage to exceptional heights. She expresses it this way,

"God gives me a strong back to endure the pace of what is expected of me here and to be reminded that we eat an elephant one bite at a time...and if this is my last day on earth, I will never have to say, 'God...I wish I had done far more than I have!'"

I like that. We can "go on" even if the world around us at times has the look of falling apart...like the great Temple at Jerusalem..crumbling. WHY? Because God is with us. Because He has promised strength from beyond. Strength not only to endure, but strength to do those loving things...those encouraging things for others. He has called us "to do" in His name.

PRAYER

PASTORAL PRAYER: November 15, 1992

O THOU who art with us in our restlessness as well as in our rest, help us in this call to prayer to find a gracious invitation to renewal.

WE FIND it in our hearts this day to thank Thee for mercies that have followed, yea preceded us, all our earthly days:

For seedtime and harvest and food enough.
For energies of mind and hand, and work to do.
For dead-end streets and U turns made, and open roads that followed.
For critical interventions of the right friend, the right book, the right thought - at precisely the right moment of life.
For the sheer wonder of our creation, our preservation and redemption.
For stout promises and bright hopes that keep us thinking kindly of the future.

WITH mind and heart and strength, O God - YEA...with all that is within us - we would bless and praise YOUR HOLY NAME!

WE PRAY THIS MORNING in support of the quiet people of our city who go on day by day rendering a much needed service in a world that is often loud and unappreciative:

Visiting nurses, hospital orderlies, change-booth clerks.
Those who bus our dishes, take our orders, clean our offices, open our doors.
Those who care for the sick and troubled.
Those who counsel the unemployed and distressed.
Those who show up faithfully to teach in our schools and who show what love and concern and patience can mean in a young life.

HERE WE SIT, O LORD, hardly knowing who we are, and yet in moments of worship often sensing that we live in relation to a Power and Presence higher and greater than ourselves.

HELP US to love YOU - without loving ourselves the less.
HELP US to serve YOU - without serving our world the less.

CONSOLE THE frayed affections of all who find it difficult to cope with change.
STEADY THE RESOLVE of those who would lead us in new and untried ways.
AMPLIFY the voices of those who speak the cause of peace, the cause of the poor, the disadvantaged of our society - the hurt and the hungry.

AND KEEP US ALL close to the side of Christ - mindful of His values and dependent on His spirit, receptive to His peace and power -

FOR WE would live, even as we now pray - through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, November 15, 1992

VISITORS / GREETING

- A. A word of welcome to the visitors who have joined us in worship....we invite you to join us for some fellowship downstairs at the coffee hour.
- B. Coffee hour is a "good place to get started" in our church. Warm, easy, relaxed...good refreshments. Be free in the sharing of your name. Fill out a visitor card. Sign one of the guest books. Come, worship with us....come, work...
- C. Roots are deep in the soil....doing Lord's work here since 1837. Minister in the name of Christ...and it is in His loving spirit....
- D. Members: wear name tags...go out of your way to make some new friends. Also welcome back Leroy Coffman, here from Djakarta, Indonesia....active here from 1981 - 1985. Dear friend to many of us....

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Review the parish concerns listed in the bulletin. Busy time right now...Christmas Fair approaching...this coming Saturday. Respond with your "Fair Share".
- B. Tonight the MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE will sponsor another of our "Conversations in Membership" for new friends. Come and learn about the church. Speakers, refreshments and a special colored slide presentation prepared by Sam Wilson. Remember John Wesley's words,

"If your heart is as my heart is, then
come - and give me your hand...."

Hearts and hands are needed to keep this ministry strong.
New members to be received on December 6th. Get to know us
and hopefully further on down the road you will want to....

- C. The 1993 Financial Canvass "peaks" today. This is our "Dedication Sunday"..."loyalty Sunday"...and Jim Perkins, Chairperson of our 1993 pledge drive will bring us up to date.
- D. A MEMORIAL SERVICE to celebrate the life of Robert J. Smith will be held on Saturday, December 5th, at St. Michael's... Share word again next Sunday...Bob sang in our choir...died in his 41st year on Thursday, November 5th.

OFFERING: "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive" In this...