

*Have you ever watched a movie, and it's getting towards the end, and you **think** it's about to wrap-up, but then it doesn't..., and you're left hanging??? And then next year, they bring out a sequel... And even the sequel doesn't wrap everything up – you know there's another chapter, yet to come...*

Well, the Gospel of Luke, is a bit like that. We're getting towards the end of the Gospel of Luke, and even now, Jesus is hinting that there's more of the story to come.

And more of the story **does** come, because the book of **Acts**, is the second volume of Luke. But even the Book of Acts does not finalise the Jesus saga.

There is a final chapter that is yet to unfold. Owh, we do have predictions of it. And the **exciting** thing is: the final chapter, is one **we** get to participate in. Whether we are living, or whether we have died, it is a chapter that we will be a part of, as the pinnacle of history is reached, and as history is completed, with the return of Jesus.

On our calendars at the moment, we're on the countdown to Christmas. *I was in Ag&Vet on Wednesday, and they have (in the foyer) a big blow-up Christmas decoration, with a big red LED display, telling me that it was 14 days until Christmas.*

And **next** Sunday, we're going to return to the **beginning** of Luke, and we're going to have a pre-Christmas message. So, next Sunday (and then on Christmas Day), we're going to be looking at the **first** coming of Jesus (when He was born as the babe in the manger).

But **this** Sunday, we catch a glimpse of the **2nd** coming of Jesus (but only a tiny glimpse). The emphasis is about the period through, **until** the 2nd coming.

Righto, I'm going to begin by sharing a bit of history. Some folk love history. Some folk hate it. But sometimes, knowing just a little bit of history, makes God's word come alive.

When we study the Bible, there is a very important date. 70AD.

It is a date of an event that occurred **after** most of the books of the Bible were written. But it is something that is described in books that had already been written. And it is described *so clearly*, many people believe it had to be written **after**-the-fact. You see, if you don't want to believe in prophecy, that's the only way to explain it (to say, "Oh, they wrote those bits in after it happened and pretended it was prophesied")...

So, what happened in 70AD? That's the year Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed.

In the year 66, Judea rebelled against Roman rule, and that's something the major world super-power of Rome, was not going to take lying down. And so they fought back to quell the uprising. And because of its religious significance for Judah, the Temple became the focus of the resistance. And so, in the year 70 General Titus lay siege to the city of Jerusalem.

"What is a siege?", some of you may ask.

When a city has very strong defensive walls (such as Jerusalem had), and the defenders **on** the wall are really good at fighting back and repelling an attacking army, the easiest way to defeat that city, is to starve it.

And so a siege sorta has 2 parts to it. Firstly, the attacking army sets a perimeter around the city, so no one can go in, and no one can get out. And so, no food can come in, and no water can come in,, and they starve the population to death... Which didn't take long in the case of Jerusalem because they began the siege 3 days before Passover. All of the Pilgrims had already entered the city. Jerusalem was bursting at the seams. And with the swelled population, it wasn't long until all the food was gone, and hunger took its toll.

And the second part of the siege, is to bombard the walls (and the city itself) with battering rams and ballista (catapults) and all sorts of siege engines...

The siege lasted 5 months. *The Historian Josephus recorded that 1.1M people died.... And as often happens in a siege, they began to eat their dead...*

Anyway, when the Romans finally broke through, the devastation was extraordinary. And the temple itself, they completely demolished it. All that was left, was some of the stones of the substructure (retaining wall).

But years before this happened, the Disciples were with Jesus at the Temple, and they were admiring the beautiful the stones

and the offerings in the temple... Apparently the Temple was really something to behold. It had been built out of these massive blocks of white marble.

And Jesus said, ⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

And in the year 70, that's exactly what happened. The temple, which had been 80 years under construction, and had been finished for less than a decade, was completely demolished, and the valuable blocks of marble were carted off... Not one of those stones was left upon another...

And the Disciples wanted to know, "When's it going to happen? And what's the signs that it's going to happen?"

And Jesus did two things (at this point). Jesus **did** answer their question, but He also used it as a teaching opportunity for end times.

The Siege/Fall of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Temple, and the bloodbath, was so awful, Jesus used it as an example of what end time chaos will be like.

And it truly was chaos.

- The resistance movement, wasn't just one movement. There were competing factions / competing rebel armies... And

- within the siege, many of the starving, clamoured for their own interests.
- It was mayhem on the streets, as the population fought over who got to eat who's donkey...;
- Parents would hide the food and keep it for themselves, while their children starved;
- the stench of death;
- rocks and fire-balls of burning pitch raining down from the sky as the siege engines did their worst...
- The occupants of the city, living with fear;
- Living with the unknown...

Utter chaos. And Jesus used this dreadful world event, as a picture of the chaos that will accompany "the end".
But not... ...

It might **seem** like it's the end, but it's not. The teaching of Jesus, has already revealed, that the return of Jesus, will be sudden and unexpected. Life will be continuing along (as per normal), and then Jesus returns.

1.

So, Jesus' first piece of advice, for those who find themselves in the midst of chaos, and it seems like the world as we know it, is about to end, Jesus' first word is **See that you are not led astray.**

Around the time of the rebellion and the siege, there was an epidemic of False teachers and false messiahs. Jesus said: **For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them.**

Doomsday preachers... Don't listen to Doomsday preachers. Don't follow them.

There is not going to be any "secret coming of Jesus." You won't need an invitation from a particular person (who's in-the-know), to go and find Jesus. When Jesus returns, we'll know it. Like lightning from one side of the sky to the other, everyone's going to see it...

When the world is in upheaval and mayhem,
Don't be led astray by false teachers. Don't be led astray by false messiah's.

2.

Secondly, do not fear.

One of the greatest blessings of being a Christian, is the "peace" we have in Jesus Christ. Even in the midst of turmoil

and chaos, we can experience genuine peace. It's a lack of fear, that comes with faith.

It seems really strange to me, that we've become a generation who, comparatively have very little to fear, and yet there many, who are overwhelmed by fear and anxiety...

Somebody once said: *"Fear knocked at the door; Faith answered; There was nobody there..."*

Do you like that? *"Fear knocked at the door; Faith answered; There was nobody there..."*

Sometimes we fear, with **no** good reason. Sometimes we have a **very** good reason to be afraid, but even in those times, when we have utter faith in God, fear has no foothold.

And so Jesus says "Don't be afraid", and He gives a reason, He says: **⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults (political unrest/turmoil/revolution), do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."**

Alright, He's saying "Don't be afraid, because it might not be the end..." But you know what: Later on, when He **does** talk about the end, the picture He gives, is telling us that as Disciples of Jesus, even when it is the end, we still don't have anything to be afraid of....

Anyway, at this point, He's foretelling the siege of Jerusalem. **these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."**

But then He broadens the timeline. And He paints a picture of the world as **we** know it. And it **is** the world "as we know it", because we are living in the last days. From the time that Jesus ascended into Heaven, we have been living in what the Bible refers to, as "the last days":

- Nation rising against nation. It's always happened. Right now – right at this moment, it's happening.
 - Russia, invading Ukraine;
 - Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran (and a virtual who's who of Islamic nations), all wanting to do away with Israel;
 - China, sabre-rattling over Taiwan;
 - Afghanistan and Pakistan are at one another;
 - And that's before we mention all of the civil wars and terrorist incursions...

Nation rising against nation.
Kingdom against kingdom.

- Earthquakes in various places... We hear about earthquakes all the time...;
- Famines;
Sometimes because of drought. More often, because of war. But of course the climate alarmists would have us

believe that famines are a new and increasing thing...
But they happen, don't they...

- Pestilences: That's contagious diseases (pandemics). The world has always had contagious diseases. They happen. Sometimes they are the cause of the death of millions.

They probably spread faster now, because international transport is so much quicker. It used to take months for a pestilence to carry from one side of the world to the other. Now, it's possible, in a matter of hours.

There will be, all of these things.

There will be:

- Terrors (terrible, horrific sights).
Who will ever forget the sight of the falling twin towers;

BTW, The Greek word for these horrific sights, is "Phobetron"... It sounds a bit like an evil transformer (Deceptacons). It would be a good name for a Deceptacon "Phobetron".

Terrors

And there will be:

- Great signs from heaven.
 - Comets;
 - Meteor showers;
 - Solar eclipse;
 - electrical storms;

- Arora Australis;
- Solar flares

Are these not, great signs from Heaven? All of these things will happen. All of these things do happen.

But before the end, for Disciples of Jesus, there will be a terrible age of persecution. **they will lay their hands on you and persecute you.** Who is “they?”

Pretty-much everyone. In V17, Jesus says: **¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake.** Never let it be said that being a Christian, is a popular thing.

For Christians, there will be religious persecution (delivered **up to the synagogues**); There will be political persecution (**you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake**)... It happened for the early church; It's happening now.

Even in the book of Acts, we see the first generation of disciples being hauled before the religious authorities. Stephen was the first Martyr; The Apostle Paul was jailed multiple times, and finally executed in Rome... James was beheaded...

And the persecution didn't end with the early church. It has continued right throughout history, and it's happening today. There is religious persecution.... e.g. In some places, under Islamic rule, Christians are given a choice:

- deny Jesus and convert to Islam;

- become a lower-class, slave-like person (dhimmitude);
or
- die.

And Christians are politically persecuted. In places like N Korea & China, Christians are jailed; sent to be re-educated. And even in our own nation. In some states, if I were to preach a message that offends a particular type of person, I can be fined or even go to jail...

It is like the end, and the end can happen at any moment, and so the message is, to be ready at all times.

But:

I love the way God turns-the-tables. The Devil uses persecution to try and **stop** the Gospel from going out,,, but it actually has the opposite effect. It is because of persecution, that Christians had to keep on the move, and the Gospel kept on extending further and further out.

And even when Christians get hauled up before the authorities, that in itself, is another opportunity to bear witness for Jesus.

And we don't even need to worry, or to prepare our answers to the accusations, because Jesus will give us the words (defence/testimony); **He** will give us the wisdom, to speak words that cannot be contradicted...

I've probably told you this before, but I'm going to tell it again, because God gets the glory here – not me... *I attended a state level church meeting, over a very contentious issue. And at the beginning of the meeting, they made it clear that we were to see this as "a safe place", because they wanted everyone to be able to have their say, without being afraid...*

And so, I got up, and I told a story as an analogy of where the church was at... And there were some people who were really offended by that story.

And I was hauled up before the church disciplinary officer, to be counselled... And I had no idea what to say. I had no defence prepared.

Anyway, they told me about the complaint that was made, and how I was a very naughty boy, and (I was a bible college student at the time), but if I was a minister, I would be disciplined... (Mind you, it felt like I was being disciplined then)...

And I know this wasn't my wisdom – the Holy Spirit just gave me the words. I said: "I'm very sorry to hear that. We were assured, right at the beginning, that this would be a safe space, where we could all speak without fear. And as it turns out, it hasn't been a safe place for me..."

How could they answer that? They couldn't. And so, the matter ended right there...

And the Lord will do that for you, too. When a Disciple of Jesus gets hauled up before the authorities, **Jesus** will give us the words we need. He will give us **wisdom**, that cannot be

argued with. All we have to do, is to be there; stand; endure; and speak the words He gives us. He will give you a mouth...

For a Christian, historically, persecution is a normal part of life. Now, in our culture, we've had it easy. What we consider to be "persecution", is probably "discomfort"... But for many in the world, persecution is very real, and it can even come from those who are closest to us.

Jesus said:

16 You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends

And He said: **and some of you they will put to death.**

17 You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

And they were.

- Peter was crucified upside-down (Rome);
- Andrew was crucified (Greece);
- Thomas was speared (India);
- Phillip was executed (Asia Minor);
- Matthew may have been stabbed to death (Ethiopia)
- Bartholomew was killed;
- James was decapitated...

And the list goes on...

You can see, Jesus never does the deceptive salesman thing. He's upfront with the cost of being a Disciple. If we choose to follow Jesus, we're not choosing the popular/safe way.

And this continues today. In some cultures, if you convert to Christianity, your own family will disown you. Sometimes they will kill you. And they believe they are doing their God a service, and restoring honour to their family.

When Christians are persecuted, it very quickly becomes evident, whether our faith is genuine. You see, if your physical life is likely to end because of your faith in Jesus, why would you continue down that path?

If, to preserve your life, all you had to do, was to denounce Jesus, why wouldn't you???

I'll tell you why. Because if faith is genuine, how could we??? How can we denounce Jesus, if we truly believe... Do we truly believe? If my life was on the line, would I denounce Jesus???

Wait for this bit. I love this bit.

and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish.

Hang on a minute.... some of you they will put to death. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish.

Oh goodie, we get to die with a full head of hair...

Of course, what Jesus is saying is, “You may very well lose your life,,,” (your current physical life). But Jesus is bigger than that. Jesus keeps us, for eternal life.

19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.

This is a common theme, of what Jesus has been saying, over and over again.

Luke 9:24-26 (ESV)

24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. **25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? **26** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes.....

In this context, what does it mean to “endure”? It means to:

- continue on;
- stand your ground;
- after everyone else has fled, there you are, standing firm with Jesus.

We are living in “the last days”. That means that Jesus can return at any moment. It also means that persecution is not uncommon. It’s a test of the mettle – it’s a test of whether our faith is genuine.

When the world descends into chaos, don't be afraid. Even if our world resembles the dreadful chaos of the siege of Jerusalem... Even if it **is** the end;;; Even if we lose our lives;;; Not one hair will perish.

There is no safer place to be, than in the arms of Jesus,,, In Jesus, there is life – a life that cannot be taken away. Not by armies/demons/panicked masses... No one, can take the life that we have in Jesus (if we endure)...

So, as we come into the season where we celebrate the first coming of Jesus, let's remember, there's another chapter yet, to come. And in this final chapter, you and I, (as Disciple of Jesus) will be there.

Do you ever think what it would be like to be with the shepherds and the angels at the nativity of Jesus??? Well, don't you worry about that. We will be with Jesus, in the next chapter.

So, let's decide right now, that we will endure, because in Him, there is life.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
We love You;
We worship You;
We honour You.

Lord, we long for the day of Your coming.
But until then, help us to endure.

Strengthen our faith,
that we will not be afraid.
Thank You for the promise
that You are with us,
and that You will give us the words we need.

And we thank You,
that our eternal destiny is in You,
no matter what happens in this life.

And Lord,
we pray for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
who this very day,
are being threatened with death;
and things worse than death.

Give them strength;
Give them faith;
Give them words of witness,
for Your Glory,

Amen.