



Sunday, 13th November 2022

**Message: - Don't be fooled
Reverend John West**

Luke 21:5-19 Isa 65:17-25 Isa 12:2-6 (Song of Isa)

You sometimes hear people complain that Christianity is living a whole lot of negativity... Take the Commandments... Thou shalt not do this or that or the other.

Of course the 10 Commandments can be expressed positively. In fact the first already is... love the Lord your God, put him first: Thou shalt not commit adultery could simply be put... Be faithful to your husband or wife.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus presents a number of negatives, but they are positive in intent. It starts with a comment by Jesus' disciples about the beauty of the stones of the Temple. Jesus has alarming news for them, which points to the transitory nature of beautiful things.

PP "Do you realise that this impressive building will be no more --- not one stone resting on another?"

Today we tend to be a bit sceptical about predictions about the future. After all reliably informed people have often got it wrong in the past:-

[Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

Popular Mechanics magazine in 1949 made this prediction: "Where a calculator on the ENIAC is equipped with 18,000 vacuum tubes and weighs 30 tons, computers in the future may have only 1,000 vacuum tubes and weigh only 1.5 tons."

There was an inventor by the name of Lee DeForest. He claimed that "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."

The Decca Recording Co. once made this prediction in 1962: "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." They were of course talking about the Beatles.]

But the Disciples have already been impressed with Jesus' credentials, they are convinced that he is at least a reliable prophet... and so they ask the questions most people would ask... "When?!"

And "How will we know it's about to happen?"

Realising their alarm, Jesus paints a realistic picture about the future... and assures them with the words...

PP Don't be fooled. Don't follow them. Don't be afraid. Don't worry but also (indirectly) Don't expect a bed of roses.

PP 1 Don't be fooled – Don't Follow Them

Jesus says, Many will come claiming to be me, the Christ.

The test for the disciples would be that other events had to take place first, most notably the Fall of Jerusalem 38 or so years later in AD 70.

That part of the prediction has now taken place along with wars and rumours of war, and earthquakes. (Later verses seem to point to the end times, but we won't deal directly with those here).

So how are *we* today to distinguish between the real Jesus and a fake one.

PP How can we tell the difference between the truth about Jesus and a false belief?

+ In one parish I had to pick up the guest speaker for our clergy conference from the airport. I had told him that I would pick him up from the front of the terminal, and that I had a silver Subaru Forester.

Well we made contact OK, but only after he had followed someone else's silver Subaru Forester, that happened to be parked just up the road in the opposite direction from mine.

What needed to happen?...

He needed to have more information about my particular car, such as the registration number or the fact that it has a small dent in the passenger door.

Had he spoken to the other driver that person would have told him, "No, I'm not John West," and no harm would be done...

...but just suppose the driver had decided to take advantage of the situation, and said, "Yes I'm John West, hop in." He could have taken him somewhere beaten him up and robbed him.

Now that could have happened, but it's not likely.

However, in the spiritual realm it happens all the time! Satan is out to get us. He will pose as our friend and true chauffeur through life. He looks like an angel of light, but his purpose is to deceive, divert and destroy.

How can we tell the difference? We need as much information about our *true* chauffeur as we can. The true Christ is revealed in the Scriptures, and as we read them we will know what to look for.

+ My brother lives in England, and I used to speak to him once a week over the internet.

Imagine if one day the phone rings and the voice says, "Hi John. It's Graham. I'm in need of help. Can you transfer \$10,000 to this bank account."

Now if I had that sort of money, I would really want to help him.

But how could I be sure it was him?

PP I know his voice. I know his phone number. I know his address. I know about his early life, and facts that others might not know. I also know the way in which he would approach such a request. In other words, I have spent enough time talking to him. I know him well enough to identify whether this really was him.

Now suppose a man in a white robe suddenly appeared in your Living Room one evening, saying, "I want you to move from here, to a place I will show you."
Would you know whether it was Jesus or not?

As we spend our time reading the Scriptures and talking to Jesus, we will know the truth. We will not be fooled, and we will not follow impostors.

Remember that Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd... My sheep hear my voice. I know them... and they follow me. They will not follow another.

The positive side of "Don't be fooled," and "Don't follow them" is

PP Know the Good Shepherd!

PP 2 Don't be Afraid, Why might they be afraid? and why shouldn't they be?

They might well be afraid because of the rumours of wars and riots, and starvation and diseases. The possible upheaval of their lives. But they don't have to be afraid because Jesus knows what is going to happen, and he knows that these things will not harm them.

+ I started writing the outline for a short story. The idea is a woman who after living out her life finds herself reborn and reliving the same life over again from 1950 (Rather like an extended Groundhog Day for those who know the movie). Supposing you met such a person and she was able to convince you that her experience was true. She could tell you that there would be a Cuban missile crisis in the early 60s, but not to be afraid for it would not lead to nuclear war. She would be able to warn about earthquakes and tsunamis and terrorist attacks.

Jesus claims more than prior knowledge. The Bible shows that God controls history. He is not subject to it.

At this point in time, *we* however do not know, from one day to the next, whether we will live or die, be healthy or chronically ill or be incapacitated.

We can know, however that if we have placed our lives in God's hands, then we rest with the one who holds the future, and who loves us, and who sent his Son to die for us, and who offers us eternal life.

God has been assuring his people of the future since Old Testament times. Our reading from Isaiah 65 is a fine example...

PP¹⁷ *For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;...*

²⁴ *Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.*

²⁵ *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.*

Here, in the picture of God's Kingdom is God listening to and providing for those who call on him.

PP 3 Don't worry.

In particular, they were not to worry about what they would say in defence of their faith (This does not mean that they should not have thought about how to explain their faith – the Bible exhorts us to be ready to give an account of the hope that lies within us)

We should be prepared, but we should not worry then about how it all comes out.

Why?

PP

- a) Because we will be given wisdom
- b) No one will be able to prove you wrong

Even if the disciples were to die, they were not to worry, because they would be saved from the Judgement by remaining faithful. What do you worry about today?

It helps to put those worries about the future in the perspective of eternity.

Russia is causing havoc with Ukraine and the world, prices are rising along with sea levels and stock-markets around the world may be struggling, but our God is in control of history!

PP 4 Don't think life will be a bed of roses

¹²...you will be arrested and punished.

You will be tried in your meeting places and put in jail. Because of me you will be placed on trial before kings and governors.

¹⁶You will be betrayed by your own parents, brothers, family, and friends.

Some of you will even be killed. ¹⁷Because of me, you will be hated by everyone

Jesus indicates that the Christian can expect difficulties in life.

It makes a lie of prosperity evangelism. “Come to Jesus and you will have a wonderful and comfortable life.”

Jesus said, “Follow me and you may be punished, hated, betrayed and even killed because of your faith – but, nevertheless take every opportunity to proclaim your faith.”

The wise person knows to defer immediate pleasure in order to eventually gain the greater reward.

[We know this works at an elementary level even with money.

+ Some years ago the NRMA gave away shares to its members.

We have had a few letters with the same message. Your shares are worth \$5 on the market but we will offer you \$3.50 if you sign up now and with no handling fees.

You could grab the money straight away and very easily

OR You could go through a slightly longer and more involved process and gain more.

OR You could hang on and let the shares increase in value, as they will probably do.]

Where the choice is presented, the wise Christian will defer the pleasures and comforts of this life for the treasures of heaven.

The wise Christian will be prepared to suffer persecution in order to proclaim the gospel of salvation for all who will believe.

Does this mean that we live miserably now, so that we may enjoy eternal life?

No. Not at all. The Bible tells us that it is our hope of glory that enables us to rejoice even in our sufferings. We also learn from Jesus himself that if we are God's children, then even while we may lose a great deal, he adds and multiplies and enriches our relationships in other directions, even as we live (and, as I am sure you know... relationships, not things, are the most important aspects of living.)

Yes, being a Christian *is* a challenge.

In part it is an exercise in faithfulness and perseverance.

But when we commit ourselves to God and his work we can join with Isaiah when he said... (Isa 12:2ff)

PP² *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.

³*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* ⁴*And you will say in that day:*

Give thanks to the LORD,

call on his name;

make known his deeds among the nations;

proclaim that his name is exalted.

⁵ *Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;*

let this be known in all the earth.