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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-24-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-24-2016**. This week we cover three excellent readings in which we learn more about God's righteous nature, the forgiveness that we have through Jesus Christ, and how Jesus teaches us to pray.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Genesis picks up where we left off in last week's reading where we saw Abraham meet with two angels and the Lord Jesus Himself. This week's reading deals with Abraham's pleading with God concerning the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were located just north of the Dead Sea in an area known for its great fertility. Today's reading chronicles the events leading up to the destruction of the cities turning them into the wasteland that they are today.

First Reading:

Genesis 18:20-32 NAS95 20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the

place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." 30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." 32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."

The LORD told Abraham about the terrible sin of the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 20). The text says that the LORD would go "down" to Sodom (v. 20), a word which brings with it two meanings, geographically south and downwards spiritually. Looking back to chapter 13, we see how Abraham's nephew Lot chose to live in this fertile region when the land would not support both of their herds and there was a conflict among their herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Abraham, a man who was well acquainted with God and knew of His grace and forgiveness, pleaded with the Lord Jesus before He went down to the region to judge them. We are not told how Abraham knew that the LORD's visit meant judgment. Regardless, Abraham began pleading on the basis of whether there were fifty righteous people in the cities would the LORD not destroy the people? Jesus' answer was implied as negative, there were not fifty righteous people in the region. After Abraham received this negative implication, he proceeded to boldly decrease the number, first to 40, then 30, 20, 10, and finally just 5. By implication by not responding to Abraham's final question the region of Sodom and Gomorrah did not contain even five righteous people. What a terrible condition the region had come to without having even five righteous people in the region!

We may ask, how many righteous people were there in these cities? We know that there was at least one righteous person in the land, the person of Lot, or at least he came to be righteous in his later life after the destruction of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah in which he lived. Even if Lot was righteous in the eyes of the Lord, this would not have brought the total number to the value of five predicated by Abraham's question. We know that the LORD did not destroy Lot. Rather He sent the two angels with whom Abraham had met and they eventually led him away from the city before the fire rained down (Genesis 19:24-25). Looking a bit deeper at Lot, although he may or may not have a righteous man at the time of the story in Genesis 18, we do know that sometime later he repented and was added to the hall of faith in the New Testament. We also know that God spared the city of Zoar from destruction because of Lot's request (Genesis 19:20-21).

The rest of Lot's family didn't fare so well. We know that Lot's wife didn't make the grade (Genesis 19:26). The relationship between Lot's daughters and God is murky since we know that they later

engaged in immoral sexual relations with their father since they felt that after the destruction of Sodom every man was dead and that they had to save the race from extinction (Genesis 19:19:31). This severe faithlessness may be abrogated a bit in light of the fact that they had just witnessed the terrible extermination of everyone in the region in which they lived by fire and brimstone raining from the sky (Genesis 19:24). This brings to mine the story of Elijah when he thought that he was the last believer alive in the entire world (1 Kings 19:14). Then the LORD reminded this great prophet during his brief season of faithlessness that there remained 7,000 who had or would be true to Him (1 Kings 19:18). So although Lot's daughters may have doubted God's promises made through Abraham we are not told the ultimate condition of their heart.

Abraham brought out the central point of the reading in his question at end of verse 25, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The answer, one that is woven throughout the narrative of the decreasing numbers, is a resounding yes. Yes, the Judge of all the earth shall do justly, including the destruction of the wicked. Although in our day God mostly withholds judgment of the "wicked" until after they die, the Bible is clear that judgement is a certainty for those that deny the Lord Jesus and don't yield to His Holy Spirit in giving up their sinful lives.

It is useful to read what Saint Peter wrote about today's story and Lot:

*2 Peter 2:6-9 NAS95 6 (emphasis added) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued **righteous Lot**, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,*

Peter's explanation helps us to understand the implications of living a **lifelong** pattern of sin without repenting through God's empowerment found through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was clear that we are to learn from other's mistakes, and Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a "doozie" of an example useful to all of us today. Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Corinthians 10:11). This leads us to the main point of the reading. If Lot can find forgiveness and faith in God in spite of the series of poor choices he made, we took can do the same. God stands ready to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9b-ff). Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are motivated to confess our sins (1 John 1:9a) and receive God's blessing upon our lives demonstrated by our service to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Colossians continues from last week (Colossians 1:24-28) but

skips forward to verse 12 of the second chapter. The context of the omitted verses 1 -11 in the second chapter leading up to today's reading is Paul's affirmation of Jesus' humanity and divinity, something which the Gnostics opposed. This was because the false teachers that had infiltrated the church taught that since only spirit was good in contrast to flesh that was evil, the person of the Lord Jesus could not have truly manifested Himself as divinity in the flesh. Paul said, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). He also taught the Colossian church how they were complete in Christ Jesus and spiritually circumcised in their heart without the necessity of the physical operation itself (vv. 10-11). The reading continues with important teaching on a Christian's identity in Christ.

Second Reading:

Colossians 2:12-14 NAS95 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Paul taught that as believers our spiritually dead carnal life is buried in baptism as a picture of being born from the Spirit of God. When a person is immersed in baptism they make a statement that their sins are buried with Jesus Christ's burial, but when they emerge from the water they are raised in the newness of life in a similar was as when Jesus rose from the dead. Although Jesus was dead, God raised Him from the dead (v. 12d). Through faith God in a sense raised believers from the dead (v. 12c). In addition, as believers God forgave all of our sins – past, present and future (v. 13) and nailed the record of our transgressions to the cross of Christ (v. 14). This hostile "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" (v. 14a) has been forever taken away from us!

What does it mean to have all of our sins taken away, forever, with even the record of them being destroyed? One aspect is that if Satan (or we do in our ourselves) brings our past sins back into our mind, we can call upon God in prayer to fight this spiritual battle raging against us with a one hundred percent certain outcome. This is because as believers our God has forgiven us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is only when we doubt our standing as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that these attacks can harm our minds. Another aspect is that we can trust that although people may bring up our past sins God will never do it. God through Jesus Christ has placed our sins as far as east is from west (Psalm 103:12).

Next, as we turn to the Gospel reading, we will learn something from the Lord Jesus about how He instructed His disciples to pray specifically concerning their needs. This study will be useful because we know that prayer is the antidote to worry that comes when our enemies (spiritual and physical) bring up our past sins.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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The Gospel reading from Luke is the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer that He gave in response to one of His disciple's questions, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." As you read, begin to develop a list of bullet points from Jesus' teaching. Ask, what is Jesus teaching **me** about prayer?

Gospel Reading:

Luke 11:1-13 NAS95 1 It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." 5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

What can we learn about prayer from the Lord Jesus? The big idea of Jesus' teaching on prayer was to pray to the Person of the Father, pray specifically and pray persistently. Prayer is an antidote to worry, as when Satan brings to mind our past sins as we just mentioned in the second reading. In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. Here are some other points that we can learn about prayer from today's reading.

- We have a Father (that implies a relationship with someone bigger, wiser and more able to cope with this world than ourselves; we are not orphans).
- Our Father is in heaven (He is above the fray of this world and has power and resources at his command that we cannot even fathom).
- His name is holy (His name refers to his character and essence. If he is holy, then he relates in a way that is set apart from the world's way. His holiness is what creates a foundation of trust for us to surrender our will to His will, to turn to Him in our time of need.
- He has a kingdom that is on the move. We can choose to be part of His kingdom and allow His way of heaven to infiltrate this world through my life. Instead of worrying about how I'm going to make it in this world, I am now focused on being used by God to bring His ways to bear on this world.
- He forgives us, and through His strength we can extend forgiveness to others. This is a quality

of the Kingdom of God that is countercultural to the world's ways.

- He leads us out of temptation and delivers us from evil. Do I really want to be delivered from temptation and evil, or do I want only to be delivered from the negative consequences of sin?
- He has a kingdom, power and glory that will be manifested forever. Do I want to be a part of this, or do I think that doing life on my own is a better option?
- God calls us to be specific in our prayer. If we (or others) are sick Jesus is teaching us to pray that we may be well. This may be intuitive to you, but how often have you been sick and not prayed for your own healing? Perhaps Jesus will allow sickness in your own life such as to give you compassion for others who are sick.
- God calls us to be persistent in prayer. This is clear not only in today's teaching but also in Jesus' teaching on the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). In that case Jesus applauded the efforts of a woman who continually nagged a judge to resolve her case. Jesus calls us to be persistent.

These are some amazing realities that Jesus understood and allowed Him to live in a countercultural way, free of worry and anxiety, because He knew who His Father was. He offers that same type of perspective to us, if we will ask Him to teach us to pray in this way.

As believers, we can be confident that God not only hears our prayers, but answers them. John said, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). The key is praying according to God's will. We do that by learning His will, and the way to do that is to study His revealed will in the Bible, the Word of God. God's answers to our prayers may **not** be as we expect. He may answer yes, not, wait, or lead us in another direction to pray. God calls us to pray boldly as we see in Hebrews: "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

We hope that what you have learned today will help you to pray more effectively and fervently by having the confidence that God will hear and answer you. Over the years I have prayed for a very long list (about 150) people each day concerning their salvation. Over the course of the last almost two decades I have seen God answer my prayers in miraculous ways. In one case a man who had experienced God's miraculous intervention in an accident came to know the Lord Jesus much later in his life as a result of a second drunk driving arrest. This was a man that I had been praying for over the course of about 15 years. He later told me that he had felt called to God during that entire time and this was the natural outcome of what had to happen. He was thankful for God bringing him to this point of decision by using the bad events in his life to turn him around onto the track of following Him. Perhaps one of my faithful readers will recognize the person about whom I am speaking. May God be glorified in all that we do and may we praise Him for His intervention.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Today we learned something from Jesus about how to pray. In what ways does Jesus' teaching

challenge your current prayer life?

2. Look back at your some urgent prayers you made to God in the past year. Were any of these written in a journal? How were these prayers answered? How helpful would it be for you to write down certain prayer requests in a journal in order to be able to remember and to look back and update them with notes about how God responded? Consider starting a prayer journal and using note cards to write down your urgent prayer requests that you carry with you each day.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072416.cfm

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 111

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-29-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **11-29-2015**. This week we open with teaching from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah then move to one of the Apostle Paul's letters to a young church in the earliest years of Christianity. Finally we look at a prophetic portion of the Gospel of Luke. These are not easy passages to understand, but we'll take a careful but brief look at each one.

Introduction to the First Reading:

It's helpful to remember that Jeremiah lived during the time of Judah's spiritual downfall and the beginning of her captivity about 500 B.C. Assyria had been the dominant nation of the time, but was tottering on the brink of ruin, while Babylon and Egypt were struggling to take over world control. Jeremiah warned of Babylon's victory, but Judah failed to repent and ignored his warnings. As a result, Judah suffered destruction, but the prophet announced that she would one day be restored and come into worldwide blessing.

Jeremiah's prophecy reveals God in two aspects like the two sides of a single coin. The book demonstrates His demands and judgment, but it also shows the tenderness of His love. He had chosen this particular prophet to give His message, perhaps, because of Jeremiah's sensibilities and tenderness. One writer has suggested that in that way Jeremiah was "the true forerunner of our Lord."

The purpose of this Old Testament book is twofold: to reveal God's attitude toward sin (thus, the punishment of Israel who had sinned against Him) and to reveal the coming restoration of Israel under their coming king.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 33:14-16 NAS95 14 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. 16 'In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'

Jeremiah 33 is the final chapter in a section, beginning with chapter 30, that has to do with the restoration of Israel. The opening words in this passage are obviously prophetic; that is, they are referring to some events yet in the future. But there is no clear indication of when these events will occur—relatively soon or at some distant point in the future. There are a few inferences, however, that give us some understanding of God's plan for His people. It's evident, for example, that the writer is revealing God's program for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." These terms identify the two segments of the nation of Israel that had been divided after the reign and death of King Solomon. God's "good word" about His chosen people will be fulfilled. What He has planned and now intimates will be completed in His chosen time.

At some future point in time ("in those days and at that time") a "Branch of David" will appear. This term takes us back to chapter 22, verses 2 and 4 where the writer makes reference to the "king of Judah, who sits on David's throne" and "kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David's place on his throne." Again, we are made to think of God's covenant spoken of in 2 Samuel 7:8-17 where God promised that David and his heirs would rule over Israel. God said, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

The promises of verses 15 and 16 of today's reading should have been a great encouragement to Israel, who was to suffer certain captivity and removal from her land. In the future, the promised king is to execute justice and righteousness on the earth." As a result, "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety." That will be a time unlike anything in Israel's previous history. She has always been attacked by godless nations, and, even in our day, persecution continues for today's Jewish people. Praise God, some day that will end!

The final statement of our reading suggests an unusual name for God's people. Jeremiah wrote, "And this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'" Perhaps the intention is to remind Jeremiah's audience that righteousness is not the result of anything one can do—offer sacrifices, observe the sacraments, serve others, etc.—but righteousness is found only in Jesus Christ. As the Christian identifies with Jesus and His finished work on the cross, it is the righteousness of Jesus that is conferred upon the believer. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Some scholars think that 1 Thessalonians may have been the earliest book written in the New Testament. The church in the city of Thessalonica (in modern day Greece) was launched on the second of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. He was there for about three weeks, teaching about the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, whom he identified as the Messiah (Christ). Some responded well to Paul, but others rejected his message (because of jealousy, Acts 17:5) and forced him to leave town.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Thessalonian Christians and to give them further teaching, especially about the return of Christ, which is a common topic in the book, referred to in all five chapters.

In many of his letters to the young churches in the first century Paul offers significant prayers on the readers' behalf, also asking them to pray for him. Today's reading begins with a part of one of those prayers (3:11-13) and concludes with a challenge to the people (4:1-2).

Second Reading:

1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2 NAS95 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. 1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's great love and concern for his learners is evident in his frequent mention of wanting to visit with them and his continual prayers for them. Before his prayer, beginning in verse 11, Paul tells them that he prays "earnestly . . . night and day" that he might see them face-to-face. Why? Not only because he loves them, but he also wants to continue his ministry to them, completing "what is lacking in your faith," that is, giving them a full understanding of the truth they have adopted.

In his prayer, Paul makes four requests: 1) that God might clear the way so that he could see the Thessalonians again; 2) that he might be able to supply what was incomplete in their fledgling faith; 3) that their love for one another might increase; and 4) that they would be spiritually strengthened and be found blameless and holy.

Regarding their love, we should note that it begins with one another and then includes "all people." Jesus said that his disciples were to be known by their love for one another (John 13:35). It's truly unfortunate that Christians and churches are sometimes criticized by outsiders because of the divisions and animosity that seem to characterize some groups of professing believers. As the people of the church learn to love one another more fully, their testimony to the world will be enhanced. But, love is not to be limited to within the church family. As God "so loved the world" (John 3:16), so should His people love those who need the Savior. Paul uses himself as an example of love; he says he abounds in love for them. And, of course, the greatest example is Jesus himself, who gave his life

for those He loved, the perfect fulfillment of John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

Somehow Paul relates the fulfilling of the instruction to love with a proper standing before God as "blameless in holiness." It is the clear teaching of Scripture that no one can stand in the presence of God on his own behalf. A holy and perfect God cannot be approached by anyone tainted by sin—and we all are (Romans 3:23). Paul refers to the "coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints," an event to occur when Jesus returns to establish His promised kingdom on earth. The saints who return with Him will have been saved by His grace and clothed in His righteousness (Revelation 19:8). At that point they will be blameless and holy. Perhaps Paul is suggesting that when the Christian demonstrates God-like love toward others, he is giving evidence of his genuine conversion, a born-again experience that, by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, presents him holy and blameless before God.

Paul then moves in chapter 4 to admonish the brethren. He does so "in the Lord Jesus," that is on the authority of Jesus. Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit in the writing of the epistles (see 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21), so his exhortation can rightly be said to be the Word of God. He encourages them "to walk and please God" as they had been instructed by him (v. 1). He commends them for doing so, "just as you actually do." It's easy to accept someone's admonition and instruction, when he also commends you for how you are responding. Of course, while they had done well, they could still do better, so he challenges them "that you excel still more." Christians should always seek to excel—not to be better than others, but to improve for the glory of God.

Paul's final statement in this passage is a reminder that he is not speaking for himself or on his own authority. He is speaking "by the authority of the Lord Jesus." The Christian should never read God's Word without the full realization that, whoever the human author, these are the words and instructions that God has given, and they must be obeyed out of love and gratefulness for His having providing the way for us to have an intimate relationship with Him by faith.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The New Testament begins with four Gospels, stories of the good news of Jesus' incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and return to heaven. Why four Gospels? you might ask. While they all generally cover the same story, they offer a variety of events, stories, and sayings of Jesus. They give them from different perspectives, and together we get a more complete picture of the truth. Luke acknowledges in his opening paragraph that there were many stories about Jesus, but he had a particular story to tell. While the others may present Jesus as king and Messiah (Matthew), or a servant to man (Mark), or as the Son of God (John), Luke emphasizes Jesus as Savior, a divine man. He stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ and his perfection as a human.

Luke's audience probably consisted mostly of Gentile Christians, but he wrote to show his readers that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentles. He affirmed that what those early Christians had been taught was indeed true and trustworthy. Like Matthew, Luke records significant teachings of Jesus

regarding end times. He shows that Jesus did not teach that His return would be immediate; rather there was to be an indeterminate time between His resurrection and the second coming. But Jesus is to return in bodily form. The Apostle Paul writes later to clarify certain misunderstandings about end times, also. (See 1 & 2 Thessalonians.)

Luke's account is more chronological than the other Gospels. Today's reading is taken from Christ's teaching as He approaches Jerusalem for the climactic final days of his earthly life. In this passage, which could be titled "The Signs of the Times," He speaks of the coming of the Son of Man (the title He frequently uses to speak of himself).

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 29 – 33 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Luke 21:25-36 NAS95 25 "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. 28 "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29 Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. 33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

34 "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. 36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Immediately preceding the return of Christ, there will be signs and wonders in the heavens. In a parallel passage (Matthew 24:29), quoting from the Old Testament prophets, it is said that "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." As might be expected, the text tells us that there will be dismay among the nations on the earth and men will faint from fear. That fear is the result not only of the fearsome celestial events but from the expectation of things that are yet to come. It is not difficult to image the rampant terror on the earth when "the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

It is then that the Lord Jesus will return to earth. "The Son of Man coming in a cloud" is a quotation from Daniel 7:13 in which the prophet also writes of the glory and dominion that is to be given Messiah at that time. The careful Bible student may recall that 40 days after His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven "and a cloud received him" (Acts 1:9). Luke is also the writer of the Book of Acts, and he went on to record the words of the angels at the ascension. They said, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Jesus warns His hearers that they must be prepared for the day of His return, even though that date has not been revealed. When the signs begin to appear, it's a warning to the faithful to look beyond the frightful circumstances and anticipate their final redemption. Redemption is a significant term regarding the believer in Christ. He has been lost in his sin and, as a result, separated from God. But in God's grace and out of His unending love, He has provided a way for the sinner to be redeemed—to be bought with a price and restored to God. That price, of course, is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross where He paid the infinite penalty of sin.

Jesus broke into the narrative to tell a story about trees. When trees sprout leaves in the spring, you can begin to anticipate the fruit they will produce in the fall. Parables are stories that use the common elements of life to illustrate spiritual truth in language anyone can understand. Jesus makes the application. As buds on trees anticipate a harvest, so the signs of the times anticipate the culmination of God's plan in the return of Jesus and the establishment of His eternal kingdom on earth. The last statement in the paragraph is the wonderful affirmation that God's Word is eternally true. But the sentence preceding that has been difficult for Christians to understand. What did Jesus mean when He said, "This generation will not pass until all things take place"? Obviously, it cannot mean the generation to which Jesus was speaking. They're gone, and the predicted events have not yet occurred. It may be best to understand that Jesus was likely referring to the generation that would be alive when the predicted signs actually occur.

The passage concludes with additional warnings to the believers who will be alive when the signs of the end times appear. They are to be prepared so the events don't fall on them like an unexpected "trap." These events, Jesus says, will come upon every living person at that time; none can escape. He is specific in his warnings. They must "be on guard," and he names the dangers to avoid: "dissipation" (harmful self-indulgence) and its frequent companion "drunkenness." A third is more subtle, "the worries of life." Elsewhere Jesus had taught that His followers need not be concerned about such things: clothing, food, and so forth. God is faithful to provide for His own when their trust is in Him (Matthew 6:25-34). In those last days, Christ-followers must be giving their attention to spiritual and eternal matters rather than mere physical and temporal concerns.

The final admonition for those living in the end times is to be "on the alert at all times." That includes praying for the strength that only God can give in perilous times. Only He can enable His children to escape all the terrible events of those last days. In doing so, they will one day stand before "the Son of Man," to worship Him and to receive the crown of life that He has promised (James 1:12).

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways are you trusting in your own efforts to please God or in the sacrifice of Jesus and His resurrection for your righteousness?

2. Describe how your life reflects the love of God in the way you act toward other Christians and to the people of the world?

3. In what ways are you heeding the warnings of Jesus so that you are "on guard" and "on the alert," as you anticipate the return of Jesus? List two ways in which you are doing this.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/112915.cfm

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB