

Life of Faith: Hold Fast

Luke 21: 5-19:

⁵ Some people were talking about the beautiful stones used to build the temple and about the gifts that had been placed in it. Jesus said, ⁶ "Do you see these stones? The time is coming when not one of them will be left in place. They will all be knocked down."

⁷ Some people asked, "Teacher, when will all this happen? How can we know when these things are about to take place?"

⁸ Jesus replied: Don't be fooled by those who will come and claim to be me. They will say, "I am Christ!" and "Now is the time!" But don't follow them. ⁹ When you hear about wars and riots, don't be afraid. These things will have to happen first, but that isn't the end. ¹⁰ Nations will go to war against one another, and kingdoms will attack each other. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in many places people will starve to death and suffer terrible diseases. All sorts of frightening things will be seen in the sky. ¹² Before all this happens, 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. ¹³ But this will be your chance to tell about your faith.

¹⁴ Don't worry about what you will say to defend yourselves. ¹⁵ I will give you the wisdom to know what to say. None of your enemies will be able to oppose you or to say that you are wrong. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed by your own parents, brothers, family, and friends. Some of you will even be killed. ¹⁷ Because of me, you will be hated by everyone. ¹⁸ But don't worry! ¹⁹ You will be saved by being faithful to me.



Last week we looked at a passage from 2nd Thessalonians as we began the “Life of Faith” series, looking at how we stand firm in our faith. We talked about how Satan and the lies of

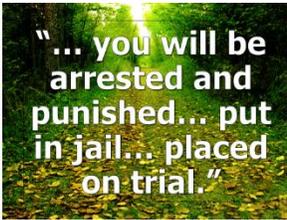
this world ceaselessly work to lure us into sin and to separate us from God’s love. To counter this, the Holy Spirit speaks into our life and we do our part by studying the Word of God,

by being faithful in our prayer and worship lives, and by living out the example that Jesus Christ set for us in the New Testament writings. Today, we continue in the series as we study how we can hold fast to our faith. Let us pray.



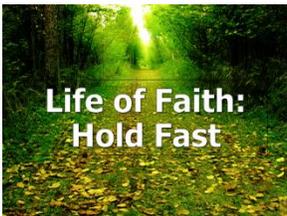
Jesus said, “*The time is coming when not one of them will be left in place. They will all be knocked down.*” Can you imagine a time when this place is not here? Can you imagine a time to

come when this beautiful church is like the temple Jesus is talking about in Luke 21, not one stone left on top of another? In our passage Jesus goes on to speak of times of war, of earthquakes, of starvation, of terrible diseases. If one looks around the world today, do you see these things? If one looks around our country this very day, do we see violence and poverty and disease? We live in a time where the end is closer than it ever was in Jesus’ time. And surely we hear the voices of doom and gloom and other voices saying that the end is near.



To go one step further, can you envision a time in America when Christians are persecuted for their faith? Jesus spoke of this day coming too. In verse twelve we heard, "*Before all this happens, 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.*" We are not quite to that point yet, are we?

But we certainly have a greater sense of being cautious about how we choose to live out our faith in the greater world. At times, we may be hesitant to stand up and to be vocal proclaiming the ways our faith calls us to live, especially when we speak against another's choices or lifestyle. At times, we measure our words carefully and we tread lightly. In today's passage, Jesus is predicting a time when we will have to stand up for our faith. It will be a time when standing up will come at a cost. Yet, perhaps, the times of arrest and trial that Jesus is speaking of are a long way off for us.



Even if the day Jesus speaks of in the passage are a long way off, in the day to day of our lives, we are often put to the test and must decide many times a day whether or not we will

choose to stand firm and to hold fast to our faith. We each make many decisions each day or week that either side with God or side with the world. Some are seemingly small and rather insignificant. Some are not. When someone comes to me and they are angry or upset about something, do I listen lovingly and seek to find understanding or do I jump to condemning and judging? When I am presented with the opportunity to be of service, do I to take the time to step into that or do I choose not to, rationalizing the opportunity

away? When I know another needs some attention and kind council, do I make the time for that to happen or do I let it slide, because it is simply more convenient to do so? In other words, do I always hold fast to the teachings of Jesus and follow His example?

Sometimes our testing comes in the trial. In the midst of a struggle, do we turn to God and hold fast to our faith or do we cling to other things? When we feel like we are being pressed in on all sides, do we keep a firm grip on God and our faith or do we turn to alcohol or food or some other form of comfort or release?

Ultimately, on the big picture level, we know that once we have claimed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, then we know that our salvation rests secure. While this is our long-term view, it also affects our day to day as well. Certainly, knowing the end helps us live faithfully in the day to day. In Isaiah 12, verses two through five, hear the hope that comes with knowing we are saved:



"²Surely 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. ³With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴And 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. ⁵Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth."

Because God is our salvation, we can trust in our faith. Because we can trust in our faith, we need not fear what the world might bring. We can hold fast because God is our strength and our might. Through knowing God as our salvation, we can hold fast to the faith we profess.

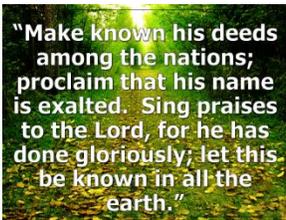


Paul also encourages us to hold firmly to our faith in 1st Corinthians 12. Reading verses one through four:

"¹My friends, I want you to remember the message that I preached and that you believed and trusted. ²You will be saved by this message, if you hold firmly to it. But if you don't, your faith was all for nothing. ³I told you the most important part of the message exactly as it was told to me. That part is: Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say. ⁴He was buried, and three days later he was raised to life, as the Scriptures say."

This message is the essence of our faith. It is the message found throughout the Scriptures. It is the same promise we heard earlier in Isaiah 12: you will be saved if you hold fast to your faith. The faith that Paul speaks of is the faith that we hold onto: Jesus died, was buried, and was raised to life on the third day. Jesus was raised to life to offer us the free gift of salvation. Thanks be to God for this gift. This is the faith and hope that we hold fast to.

The message Paul shares is a message we are called to share. In Isaiah 12 we are called upon us to share our faith. Reading again, from verses four and five,



"Make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth."

"Make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth". We are to take

the faith that we hold fast to out into the world. We are to proclaim God's mighty works, to exalt God's name, to sing praises to our God.



Life of Faith:
Hold Fast

The message we live out and proclaim has to be the message that we hold fast to. The faith we profess should be the constant in our lives. Our faith should not be present at one

point and absent at another point. Our faith cannot be based upon how life is going at any one moment. Our faith cannot be called upon in times of trial and be forgotten when all in life seems good. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our faith must be the same way. We must cling to our faith at all times and in all seasons. This is a challenge because there are many things we can cling to. Our faith in Jesus Christ is the only rock that we can cling to that will not change, that will not falter, that will not end.

In verse fourteen, Jesus says, *"Don't worry"*. Do not worry. I will be there. Do not worry. I will give you the words to say. Do not worry. I came to save. Do not worry. I am in control. This is a message we seem to need to hear lately. In this Presidential election year, there seems to be a good deal of worry. I think that is natural every four years, but this year it seems to be ratcheted up a bit.

Perhaps there is a bit more unknown, a bit more that we are unsure of as a nation. You do not have to spend long listening to a news show or browsing a social media feed to realize that there is tension and angst and a lot of other emotions out there right now.

Yet here is our reality. Somewhere down the line, whether in four or eight years, we will elect a new President. We will have survived or thrived through this presidency just like we have ever since George Washington was elected 227 years ago. This is because in four or eight years, God will still be God. In four or forty years, God will still be in control. In eight or eight hundred years, God will still be sovereign over all.

At the beginning of today's passage, the disciples are standing in the temple. They are taking in the beauty and wonder of the temple. This still happens today. People go to the great cathedrals and marvel. People go to the world's famous museums and are taken aback by the beautiful paintings that remind us of the stories of our faith. We may even come to this place from time to time and think, "How nice this is".

Jesus goes on to say that one day the temple will be no more. The same will be true of the great cathedrals and the beautiful artwork. Jesus goes on to warn us that if our faith is in the things - the buildings, the artwork, the churches - then we will be lost when our faith is shaken or tested. Instead, our faith must be in

Jesus. Our faith must be in just, not about Jesus. If we read all the stories of Jesus and appreciate all He said and are amazed at what He did, but do not go any deeper than knowing the stories, then we have simply created another empty building. The words must travel the short distance from our heads to our hearts. The words must take on understanding and application. It is at this level that they begin to transform our lives. When we allow Jesus to come alive in our hearts, then we begin to be transformed and to live out our faith instead of simply knowing our faith.

If our faith is built upon a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then He lives in us. If Jesus lives in us, we will not be deceived by false prophets or drawn in by the lies of the world or shaken by life's storms. He will guide us from within our hearts and Jesus will allow us to hold fast to our faith forever and always. May it be so for each of us. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

1. What changes have you observed over the course of your lifetime concerning how faith is viewed or accepted in the culture?
2. Which 'small decisions' do you struggle with most when you think about holding fast to your faith? What are your bigger struggles?
3. In what ways are you proclaiming God's good deeds and making known God's glorious works to all the earth? (or at least those around you)

4. What do you tend to cling to instead of your faith? Pray for God's direction and strength to hold fast to your faith in all things and in all ways.