

## **“Getting Ready for Company”**

**Luke 21:25-36**

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So which is it? Is it asteroids dashing through space on a collision course for earth? Is it terrible tornadoes that swallow entire towns? Is it space aliens invading earth and making a mess of our major cities? Is it giant winter storms that engulf all of the northern hemispheres and let wolves loose in New York City? Or is 2012 when the Aztec Calendar says the world is going to end. So which is it? Which is your favorite disaster movie? I have to say that I am always amazed at the film industry's ability to think of new and amazing ways to destroy the world. Yet even when we have retread disasters we flock to the theatres. We will spend a small fortune on tickets and pop-corn in order to see one more world wrecking adventure. And why is that? Well I have a theory. The theory is that we go because we know the disaster won't win. We know that somewhere in the movie a hero will arise and somehow help humanity escape. Whether it is Will Smith and Jeff Goldblume in Independence Day and Tom Jones' voice in Mars Attacks we know that there will be salvation in the end. While mayhem may ensue, we will escape.

This morning that is how I would like you to see the apocalyptic passage we have before us. As Amy said a couple of weeks ago there are many ways to deal with these kinds of stories...stories which often disturb us. But this morning I want you to see them a sort of First Century disaster movie in which a hero emerges and God's people are saved. Let's begin with the disaster. You can't do much better than apocalyptic and we see that in verse 10. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilence. And there will be great terrors and signs in the heavens...often meaning comets." Then Jesus continues with signs in the sun, the moon and stars and people will be in distress. (Kind of reminds me of the old Godzilla movies where people are just running around.) But then there comes the hero. "Then you will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. Then there will come salvation. "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." While mayhem may ensue, they will escape.

It would be easy, having drawn the comparisons, to simply write these words off then as some sort of Second Temple tall tale; great for the telling but not much else. The only trouble with that would be that those who heard Jesus speak these words wanted more than a tall tale...they wanted to know if the story was true. And they wanted to know because they were already in the disaster. They wanted to know the hero was on his way. The people of Jesus time were living in the midst of not merely one disaster, but many. There was economic meltdown with people losing their homes and their land. There was cultural meltdown because Greek and Roman culture was tearing apart Judaism and all that it stood for. There was religious meltdown. Not only was Judaism fighting against Greek and Roman religion, Judaism was a house divided that fought within itself. There was political meltdown. The Romans, while not the Taliban,

were an occupying power that taxed and oppressed those who were not citizens. So the people wanted to know if the story was real. They wanted to know if heroic company was coming. They wanted to know because if God's messiah was not on his way, then there was sense holding to the faith. Why bother if Rome was going to win in the end and God had already checked out.

It was to those people and to those questions that Jesus addressed his teaching. He wanted them to know that God was not only at work in that moment, in and through himself, Jesus of Nazareth, but that ultimately he, Jesus would return to finish the job he had begun. Jesus wanted the people to know that there really was hope that God would indeed set all things right. He wanted them to know that there was a future worth being faithful for. Company was coming and that company was himself, the Son of Man. The gift of these words is that that same promise comes to us as well. They are a powerful reminder that God is not done with this world or with us. God has promised that some time and some place Jesus will return and complete the work he began two thousand years ago. When that will be, or how that will take place only heaven knows. But it is a promise that Jesus tells us we can count on.

The challenge for us then is to be ready...ready for company coming. It is to lead lives which reflect our belief that the one whose birth we will celebrate is the one who will complete the task of redeeming this world and all that is in it. And that is reason for hope...hope that even in a world filled with disasters of all kinds, God is still at work and God will come and complete the task.