**318 Near of Time and Place - 1**

Last week we were reminded of the blessings granted to us as the rhythms of our lives and of our worship are maintained. These rhythms provide a steady drumbeat of perspective and familiarity, on which we then play as it were fresh tunes as each day comes and goes. The whole thus becomes a God-given blend of the old and the new, the established and the novel, the certain and the less certain, the comfort and the risk. A drifting too far either way makes us the poorer: too much of the old squeezes out the new-and-now, while too much of that new-and-now deprives us of the riches of our Christian heritage.

The Lord Jesus steadily lived out this blend in His Gospel ministry, being conscious of where His Father-given calling, based on the rhythms of the long-standing Jewish Feasts, was up to in His own life. “Wist ye not? ...” He said to Mary and Joseph in the temple (Luke 2.49), for Jesus knew that out of obedience to His heavenly Father He simply had to be in the temple at that particular time. At the start of His public ministry Jesus said to His mother at Cana, “Mine hour is not yet come” (John 2.4, KJV), and later, to His brethren, “My time is not yet come ... not yet full come” (from John 7.6 & 8). Yet as His ministry approached its climax, we read, “My time is at hand” (Matthew 26.18), and “... when Jesus knew that His hour was come ...” (from John 13.1). So alongside Jesus’ awareness of the rhythms of time in which His life and ministry were set, He tackled each new day with a mix of appropriate action and reaction.

Then that day came when on the Mount of Olives Jesus’ disciples asked Him about His words of sorrow over Jerusalem (Matthew 23.37-39, including His quoting from Jeremiah 22.5 and Psalm 118.26) – “... when shall these things be? and what [shall be] the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (from Matthew 24.3, KJV: the Greek is better translated as ‘age’ rather than ‘world’).

In reply, Jesus gave detailed prophecies which, as we see so often throughout Scripture, have had a short-term fulfilment (in this case in the years AD 66-73) with a long-term fulfilment yet to come. He then referred His Jewish hearers to the fig tree, a frequent scriptural reference to Israel (Matthew 24.32-33 and parallels): a tender branch and sprouting leaves show that summer is near – “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, [even] at the doors”. The culmination of “all these things” is the visible return of “the Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24.30) – an event still in the future and 100% guaranteed to occur.

Elsewhere in the New Testament we see that the Lord’s promised return was regarded as imminent (egs., Romans 13.11-12 / Philippians 4.5 / James 5.8 / Revelation 1.3 and 22.10), yet here we are, 1900 years later, still waiting! Has there been a mistake? No. We do well to remember that “the Lord’s thoughts and ways” are far higher than our thoughts and ways, and that “His word will not return to Him void, but will accomplish that which He pleases and bring prospering” to where it is sent (from Isaiah 55.8-11 / and egs., Psalm 90.4 and II Peter 3.8-9).

Now Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 / Mark 13 / Luke 21 clearly concern the Jews alone, rather than “the Church”, which became predominantly Gentile in membership. The Church is described as a “mystery”, for it was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets (eg., Ephesians 1.9-10 & 2.11-3.12), and was introduced by God the Father only after the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. We are told that “the Church Age” would last only for a set period, after which God’s attention would revert once more to the Jews: for example, “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21.24), and, “that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11.25).

So there we have it, from the Lord Jesus and from the Holy Spirit through Paul, that a time would come when the Age of the Church and of the Gentiles would cease, followed by God returning to deal with the Jews once more.

Next time God willing we can rehearse what prophesied events are yet to occur for the Church, for the Jews and for the Gentile nations; then consider the grounds there may be for believing that we really are now in “the last days”; and then emphasise how we are to live our Christian lives, between the drumbeat of those rhythms and the newness of those fresh tunes, day by day.

Meanwhile, we watch and pray!

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