

Conflicting Loyalties:
Christ or Caesar?

Coronationville
Luth. Church
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Luke 21: 8-19
(Luk. 21 vs. 12 b, 13, 19)

No responsible religious leader would dream of making such serious utterances as Jesus is making in this passage (Luke 21: 8-19) if the situation did not warrant such urgency and such explicitness. The ^{immediate} reason for his utterance here is 3-fold:

1. Christ is in Jerusalem (the centre of church and state authority of Israel) preparing himself and his disciples for his arrest, his trial and execution and his crucifixion. He zealously uses every moment to explain to his disciples and his adherents what is at stake for him. He senses and portrays the urgency of the unfolding drama, the pressingness of every minute, the significance of every utterance he makes.

2. In this passage he deals specifically with the persecution and the suffering which his disciples would face before the destruction of Jerusalem (which took place in 70 AD) - a persecution and a suffering which was the

result of their love and loyalty to Jesus. His heart bleeds for them but because his love for them is so deep and pure he dare not mislead them with glib answers or false assurances. Therefore he makes quite clear to them his own expected suffering, death - and resurrection! - as well as the persecution and suffering they have to face and expect as a result of their discipleship. And Jesus clearly describes the nature thereof: "You will be brought before synagogues and put in prison; you will be taken before kings and governors for your allegiance to me"

3. The third reason for this utterance of Jesus is to make clear to them why it will happen and what support they could expect from Him: "This will be your opportunity to testify. By standing firm you will ~~win~~ ^{win} fine life for yourselves"

We are grateful for these assurances of Jesus given to his disciples, especially as the church through the ages, whenever persecuted

situation of persecution and suffering arose, Christians were heartened and strengthened by these words and promises of Christ - and as we to-day in S.A. as Christians are heartened and strengthened by these very same words & promises.

But these utterances of Jesus raise a number of vital, fundamental questions that we have to face as churches and as Christians:

1. How does one withstand persecution, suffering, imprisonment and possible death: physically, emotionally, spiritually?
2. How does one withstand the power of the state ^{if that power has become evil} - especially if it is such a massive political, economic, police, and military power as that of the S.A. government - backed by the major Western powers?
3. How does one act when part of the persecution and suffering is caused and comes from a church institution supporting this evil and unjust political system like the 3 white DR churches or from sections of the multi-racial churches doing the same?

4. How does one testify: to what and to whom? About what and about whom?
5. Is there any certainty of the victory for the forces of love and justice and peace over the forces of hatred, injustice and violence? Is there ^{a supreme} power that we can depend upon & draw upon in the hour of trial & tribulation?

It is impossible to give extensive answers to all these questions in this short period available this evening - but at least we can discover some of the basic guidelines and sources of power from this passage of Luke 21: 8-19:

1. Withstanding persecution & suffering: Jesus does not supply us with a ready-made recipe to withstand persecution and suffering but He points us to His own suffering, physical and mental, and to His confession to encourage us by His assurance: This is my Body, broken for you - I share in your suffering & your pain and I make it my own!
2. Withstanding the power of the state: let us first be clear about the Biblical truth that God has given power and authority to the

state to do what is just and good. The state therefore has the right to rule & administer the civic affairs of men in justice. The state can use this power wisely or abuse and exploit it: it can make just or unjust and oppressive laws and use or abuse the power of its police force to enforce such laws; it can use or abuse the economic resources, wealth and production for the good of all the people - or it can manipulate this wealth for the advantage of a minority; it can use wisely or abuse atrociously the media to spread the truth or to churn out propaganda and falsehood.

The church has very little or no such power - and in that sense the church is powerless also to withstand or oppose the abuse of the power of the state by using the same or similar means or methods as those applied by the state. The true power and authority of the church lies elsewhere - in a totally different sphere and on a totally different level.

3. Withstanding the false church authority: This is part of the guilt of the church which she has to confess and to contend with in her own midst. This can only be done if the

church ~~again~~ discovers anew the real nature of her message and the real source of her power. And that power can only be discovered in her testimony to be obedient to Christ.

4. How to testify: I think it will be helpful if we now turn specifically to our present situation in S.A. where the ^{church} following has to state and clarify its own understanding of what is happening:

4.1 - The church must accept that there is a form of persecution of the church as the Body of Christ taking place in S.A. to-day - and everything points in the direction that this persecution will increase.

4.2 - The church must accept that this persecution includes personal suffering of clergy and laity, Christians and people of other faiths or even of no specific faith as the struggle between right and wrong, justice and injustice, liberation and oppression becomes more pronounced.

4.3 - The church must rediscover the glorious truth which Jesus conveyed to his disciples that the church has a divine mandate, an authentic power, an unquestioned authority given

(not dependant on money or structures or numbers) [7]
by God which no earthly rulers ever have!
namely to testify before all the world that
Christ is Lord - and nobody or nothing else! This
implies that neither the church as institution, nor
the state as ruler, nor any ideology or political
or economic system can ever claim this lordship
this power, this authority!

4.4 - It also implies that where the church
and Christians are obedient to Christ, no
power on earth can break the Church! The
Church has survived the threat and the onslaught
of communist rules, of the Nazi regime,
of fascist + oppressive dictatorships - it
will certainly survive any onslaught of apart-
heid!

4.5 - But this will only be the case if the
church of (the body of Christ) is willing to put
her own house in order - to look very criti-
cally at ourselves as denominations and as
real Christians and discovers:

→ where we have given false allegiance
to other powers above Christ

→ where we have been allowing forces of
division e.g. those based on ethnic differences

[8]
or ideological concepts and practices to
undermine the unity of the body of Christ;
→ where we as Christians have hesitated or
refused to
become part of a confessing community