

“Disaster-Overnight”
Pastor Sam Richards
Sermon for 12 February 2023
Texts: Luke 9:51-62

Related Texts: Genesis 19:17-25; Exodus 32:10 (calf); Leviticus 10:1-3 (Aaron’s sons); Numbers 16:31-45(Kora);1 Kings 18:30-39; and 2 Kings 1:9-18

Jesus ’Betrayal and Arrest

Matt. 26:47 While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up [a]accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him.” 49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, “Hail, Rabbi!” and kissed Him. 50 And Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you have come for.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus [b]reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and [c]cut off his ear. 52 Then Jesus *said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve [d]legions of angels? 54 How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which* say that it must happen this way?”

55 At that time Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as *you would* against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. 56 But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.” Then all the disciples left Him and fled.¹

Twelve legions of angels. . . if a legion is understood as 6,000 warring angels (a Roman legion) and if we consider the power of a single angel (2 Kings 19:35 records one angel destroying 185,000 enemies of Israel overnight!), the destructive potential of 72,000 such angels approaches the incalculable! The subjugation of the whole earth was entirely within the capabilities of God, within the usual means, at any point in time. Truly it is **Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts!** (Zechariah 4:6). This power, far above the nuclear option of some nations,—including our own nation with 5,428 warheads in inventory(!)—has been manifested at various times and in various places. Sometimes known as **fire from heaven**, some times as **kindled wrath**, we witnessed it in the destruction of

¹Footnotes

- a. [Matthew 26:47](#) Lit *and with him*
- b. [Matthew 26:51](#) Lit *extended the hand*
- c. [Matthew 26:51](#) Lit *took off*
- d. [Matthew 26:53](#) A legion equaled 6,000 troops

Sodom and Gomorrah by fire (perhaps as many as 400,000 casualties) in the time of Abraham and that, after the destruction of the wicked in the world-wide flood in the time of Noah (taking countless human lives along with most living creatures)²! On the scale of loss of life, though, nothing comparable to the Flood has occurred in human history—not even wartime mortalities combined, or slaughter during socialist purges of the 20th century— which have ranged in hundreds of millions.

Twelve legions of angels means that God retains even in ordinary means extraordinary powers! And **Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit** means that God's sovereign power has no equal—neither among men, nor in the physical world, nor even in the entire cosmos. And the fact that God has not yet used this power, this might, does not mean He never shall. Peter has foreseen it (see 2 Peter 3:8-10, 12):

8 But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

A New Heaven and Earth

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and [a]its works will be [b]burned up³. 12 . . .looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved. Being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.

Holocaust, Hebrew *Sho'ah* ("Catastrophe"), Yiddish and Hebrew *Hurban*⁴ ("Destruction"), the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II--[Source: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Holocaust>] plus five million other prisoners of war, and of conscience. I say, with great reverence for the actual evil of the Holocaust, that the picture of this as the greatest travesty in human history is something of hyperbole. Compared to the Flood, and the Day of the Lord,

²In geology/paleography there is a parallel phenomenon known as the Cambrian Revolution which covers a rapid cessation of multiple life forms and the rapid appearance of multiple life forms—including chordates, animals with spinal systems. Hardly the slow and gradual progression postulated by Darwin. With our advances in microbiology, however, we no longer assume that life forms pre-Cambrian were "simple." No, it looks more like irreducible complexity all the way back!

³Footnotes

a. [2 Peter 3:10](#) Lit *the works in it*

b. [2 Peter 3:10](#) Two early mss read *discovered*

⁴ "Hurban" refers to the **destruction** of Jerusalem and the first temple in 586 BC by the Babylonians, and, again, in 70 AD, by the Romans. "Sho'ah" rendered **catastrophe** is the term preferred by secular/irreligious Israelis and the French since a 1985 film by Claude Lanzmann. Holocaust likens the cremation of Jewish victims of Nazi racist hatred to the "burnt offerings" that used to be offered in temple ritual sacrifices seeking atonement for sins..

the Holocaust must pale in scale, scope and significance. Therefore I end this citation with @ Peter 3:13: **Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.**

I am aware, as I hope the most of you are, of the catastrophic earthquakes in southern Turkey, along the northern Syrian border which includes the rebel held territories that Assad has been trying to starve into submission. *Can their conditions degrade further?* I can't help but ponder, for comparison's sake, the historical quake of Lisbon, Portugal. Lisbon in 1755 experienced near total destruction from an initial shockwave, possibly near an 8 on the Richter scale (which didn't actually exist so as to gauge its true magnitude). The quake occurred on **All Saints' Day** and many, many Catholic Christians were at worship when the cathedrals came crashing down on them. Lisbon as the seat of Catholic authority in Portugal was shattered. A second tremor, twelve hours later, finished much that the first quake left undone! A twenty foot tsunami, coupled with urban fires in strong winds, then turned Lisbon into an inferno—upwards of fifty thousand people perished overnight, and many survivors fled the leveled city. Much history, many artifacts and art was simply obliterated and lost. This horrific event, a vast humanitarian crisis, strongly affected all of Europe—long before the European Union, or the United Nations existed to mount international responses such as are now ongoing. Yes, that was then, and now we observe that:

Turkey lies in one of the world's most active earthquake zones. In 1999 a deadly quake killed more than 17,000 in the north-west. The country's worst earthquake disaster was in 1939 when 33,000 people died in Turkey's eastern Erzincan province.

One Kahramanmaras resident, Melisa Salman, said living in an earthquake zone meant she was used to "being shaken", but Monday's tremor was "the first time we have ever experienced anything like that". "We thought it was the apocalypse," she said.

[<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64533851>]

The BBC reported quake death toll has exploded ten-fold so far (over 17,000 dead). One grieving father, who had lost his wife and two young sons, cried out, "What kind of justice is this?" Possibly aggrieved at God, this man seems to expect that life will be just while we know that nothing about life is guaranteed. There is uncertainty; we are blessed if we even survive a day. This "woke" expectation is in sych with the spirit of our times wherein we presume that reality is subject to our will—and if natural disasters aren't "just," we can adjust reality by passing laws, by censoring and denying ;language—by changing our language, or our pronouns. This is pride of flesh in a man-centered worldview: therefore we find nature uncaring, and unjust . . . the universe is flawed, and God is to be faulted in all.

These two events, separated in time by centuries, are horrific and the disparity between them declines as more deceased are located and as reports of devastation

pour in. Turkish President Erdogan, who has been in power for twenty years and is facing re-election this year, has irrationally been faulted for not being prepared for this unprecedented catastrophe (in scope, magnitude and severity). He has dispatched 60,000 personnel, supplied hundreds of thousands of tents for shelter in a bitter winter, with mattresses, blankets, bedding and pillows; sent 10 ships, over a hundred aircraft and helicopters as well as excavating equipment and opened the doors for international aid. The demand that he be prepared for the unexpected is unreasonable.

Meanwhile, we should pray for those emergency and rescue workers involved and support their humanitarian efforts which have, momentarily taken our eyes off the war in eastern Europe, the kidnapping, rape and pillage of African Christians by Muslims, and the acute suffering of millions of Chinese under a new COVID-outbreak—all heartbreaking situations caused by man's cruelty to man. And then there are our own plagues occasioned by a flawed border policy (politically motivated), crime, violence and drug trafficking as well as human trafficking—these are the conditions under which we are called to faithfully serve. We should do what we can to ameliorate all such circumstances as we can, with conditions under our control, *but the line between the two, **between what we control and cause, and all that lies outside our control*** such as earthquakes, genetically mutating viruses loosed by evil men and biological warfare which defies curtailment.

Within the conditions that we cause, as well as within the conditions we do not control and cannot control—***This is where we are called to work by faith***, advancing the cause of Christ and the frontiers of the kingdom of God for the glory of God and Christ's honor, we find our mission field. Last week we heard about the choice between faith and fear—about how we are to brave the times by faith! This week we are confronted with a whole new hand, or so it seems. I want to explore Luke 9: 57-62 with you, but before I do, I want to remind you of the creation mandate: to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and to subdue it. To exercise, under the dominion of God, authority and rule over this creation, over all animals and plant life. To be good stewards: responsible, creative and productive.

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Productivity is an amazing thing. It runs throughout our life, our work. It functions in plant life—where replication and reproduction seem most apparent. If one generation does not reproduce itself, that life form ceases to exist. And cells that

reproduce complex protein molecules in the single cell factories of cellular life appear to have this intelligent directive imprinted in them—as if they had intelligence, or were intelligently created to do what they do! **Be fruitful and multiply** is a life directive to all forms of life! Our Declaration of Independence originally read as “life, liberty and property” when these three (“natural/God-given rights”) were generally held to be foundational to prosperity—in a word, flourishing, or productivity.

Thomas Jefferson took the phrase “pursuit of happiness” also from Locke and inserted it in the place of property⁵ (as amended July 2, 1776) He drew on the “harmonizing sentiments of the day.” “By "property," Locke (apparently) meant more than land and goods that could be sold, given away, or even confiscated by the government under certain circumstances. Property also referred to ownership of one's self, which included a right to personal well being. Jefferson, however, substituted the phrase, "pursuit of happiness," which Locke and others had used to describe freedom of opportunity as well as the duty to help those in want.” These concepts of “ownership of one’s self” and “well-being” are debated in our day as “a right to privacy . . . or self-determination (my right, my body) in tussles over abortion, and vaccination policy, or as a health-care concern.

What does this have to do with discipleship? According to Luke 9, the first concern is “cost.” Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but you, my disciples will have neither. That does not mean no shelter, it means that shelter may prove optional. We are in following Jesus challenged to think of ourselves as homeless in this world because we are at home with God, in the kingdom. **Follow me** may mean, or require that.

Secondarily, there is the loosening of family obligations such as to bury one’s father! **Let the dead bury the dead** is a strong rebuke. But it is not presented as an absolute, stand-alone condition. First there is the suggestion that there are

⁵ John Locke wrote that all individuals are equal in the sense that they are born with certain "inalienable" natural rights. That is, **rights that are God-given and can never be taken or even given away.** Among these fundamental natural rights, Locke said, are "life, liberty, and property.”

When Jefferson submitted his draft to the Congress on June 28, the delegates spent little time on his opening paragraphs, which today are the most famous parts of the Declaration of Independence. Instead, they concentrated on Jefferson's list of grievances against King George and the British people

The delegates made some small changes to improve the Declaration's clarity and accuracy. But they also ripped apart the last sections of Jefferson's draft, deleting about 25 percent of it. They eliminated most of his harsh language directed against the British people and totally cut out Jefferson's passionate assault on slavery and the slave trade.

The removal of the section on slavery, Jefferson's last grievance against the king, probably resulted from objections by Southern slave-holding delegates. But Jefferson's argument was weakened when he blamed the king alone for continuing the slave trade and then condemned him for offering freedom to slaves who joined the British in fighting the American rebels. <https://www.crf-usa.org/foundations-of-our-constitution/natural-rights.htm>

others who can attend to the burial of one's father. But, more significantly, we have a different set of priorities: **you go and preach the kingdom of God.** Align yourself with heavenly things, with the things that matter eternally. Burial is relegated to the rank of luxury by this. Do what is most important and secondary matters will sort themselves out.

So housing and funeral rites are on the table. Is anything else? Well, yes, there is the swiftness of deployment. Don't take time to say goodbye, get on this work immediately. And here the work is presented as plowing, sowing and planting. **No one who puts his hand to the plow, and looking back**—this seems to suggest more than a backwards glance, but picture the folly of looking back steadfastly while attempting to plow forward. It doesn't work any better than driving that way! Look ahead, have future orientation—know where you are going as you plow and plant.

Taken together, these “costs” serve to remind us that discipleship in following Christ is more than tagging along. There must be a fundamental relocation of interest, and redirection of purpose. Instead of worrying about housing, or property ownership, or even of obtaining wealth to leverage your needs—just lay it down for the Lord. Orientation. And it is about positioning oneself **to go and preach, to declare the kingdom's approach and power**—some undoubtedly will preach to get that done! But there is also the matter of living the faith, walking the walk, the witness of your life. Are you walking after Him, or tending to your own stuff? Is your concern for the lost even discoverable in how you live, what you purchase, what you consume? Christians do commerce differently, they seek changed lives over change in the pocket. Looking back could be as simple as longing for the things that used to matter! Our longing is to be forward, and upward—always looking up to Christ. There is no reason to imagine that these instructions are restricted to the mission of the seventy which follows immediately. They were for them, and are for us as well!

Amen