

By Your Patience You Possess Your Soul
Sunday, November 17, 2019 at The First Congregational Church of
Marshalltown, Iowa

Scriptures: Luke 21:19

Introduction

There's a book out on the market by an outdoor survival specialist that reviews extraordinary accounts of endurance; people who survive extreme circumstances. Here's one of them:

"Juliane Koepcke. The German schoolgirl was 17 when her plane came apart in mid-air over Peru and she plunged 10,000ft into the jungle still strapped into her seat. With a broken collar-bone and maggot invested wounds, she walked and swam through the jungle without food for 10 days until she found help, vultures circling overhead throughout."*

In our passage for today, the Lord Jesus describes survival in the most extreme of circumstances. He describes survival in terms of standing redeemed before God at the end of the Age and the Bible tells us of a surprising strategy for living in challenging times.

Set the stage-the fall of the Temple

Jesus and His disciples are admiring the Temple in Jerusalem when He tells them that the day will come when the entire structure will be torn down. Shocked, they ask Him to describe the circumstances of such a catastrophe and He depicts a time which there will be no safe places, and what to do. In the end, He says that His followers will "possess their souls".

"Possess your souls"-when everything possible goes wrong and you still come out the other side.

It's a very interesting turn of phrase, it implies mastery and reaching full potential. The challenges of this life strengthen and solidify the practicing Christian. One book, called Great Texts of the Bible, puts it this way: "There is a very big difference between possessing a thing and making it entirely your own. For instance, I may possess a book, but the winning of

its treasure is quite another thing. I may have come into possession of a musical instrument, but to woo and win its secret melody is quite another thing." "Possess your soul" implies coming to God fully developed and ready, like a musician who has mastered their instrument. Extraordinary, considering the circumstances Jesus described.

Troubles at the end

Jesus describes many troubles at the end of the Age; false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, disease, signs in the heavens, persecution and betrayal even by family. As mentioned before, a safe place will be hard to find, but Jesus also speaks of what to do in such times.

What to do?

The positive commands in the text are as follows: don't pay attention to the false Christ-pay attention to the true Christ; do not be terrified of wars or rumors of war-don't make the world your focus; settle in your hearts not to prepare an answer when brought before a magistrate, in other words, trust God to give you what you really need when you really need it. Finally follow the instructions in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-13; stay orderly, steadfast and stick to task. Do your daily work, and when in doubt, do what you know to be the next right thing. (consider reading this passage for yourself)

Conclusion

A significant portion of the Bible speaks of things yet to come, or of the end of the Age as we know it. In the middle of it, especially this passage, we learn of ways to remain steadfast in the midst of the transient and failing age, and by our patience possess, or win, our souls.

* <https://www.thedailybeast.com/six-greatest-acts-of-human-endurance>