

## The Eternal Optimist

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**W**hen Jesus was in Jerusalem with his disciples just a few days before he was betrayed and condemned to death, he had a conversation with them about the troubling times that lay ahead. He warned of unrest among the Jews that would lead to the catastrophic destruction of the temple in Jerusalem along with much of the city, and He spoke of prolonged and recurring troubles that would distress every nation on earth. He mentioned manmade disasters, including wars between kingdoms and violence against his own followers, as well as famines, earthquakes, epidemics, and other frightening events (see **Luke 21:5-19**). None of these frightful events are presented as signs of His coming, nor did He speak of any particular sequence, only that such things will be happening on earth in the interval between his suffering to initiate the kingdom and his second coming.

In the midst of telling his followers that they would be abused “*on account of my name*” (**Luke 21:12**), He also said that his disciples would testify of Him (**verse 13**), giving purpose to the hardships. Jesus gave assurance that the troubles will in fact have an end (**verse 9**) in the Lord’s own time. In fact, Jesus indicated that when the anguish of nations seems to be growing worse and worse, and people are filled with apprehension (**Luke 21:25-26**), that’s the time when his own people should cling to the hopeful expectation of his return and “*stand up, lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*” (**verse 28**). Jesus message to his disciples then and now is “*make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves*” (**verse 14**) because he will provide help, the words and wisdom we need (**verse 15**).

What Jesus said in his discourse with the disciples on the Mount of Olives just shortly before he was betrayed amounts to instructions to be optimistic when everything seems to be spiraling out of control. Christians are assured that the Lord has everything in hand when things appear most chaotic, and he will never leave us nor forsake us (**Hebrews 13:5**). There is a purpose to faithfully testify of Jesus in all circumstances (**Luke 21:13**), and there is an end when all will be set right (**Luke 21:9**). Consequently, just a couple of days later, Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples and instructed them to remember Him, body and blood, in the consecrated bread and fruit of the vine, in that night of His betrayal, He assured them (and us) that we should not let our hearts be troubled, but rather believe in God, and believe in Jesus himself (**John 14:1**). With violent death overshadowing His immediate future, Jesus didn’t just say not to be afraid, He said not to even let ourselves have troubled hearts. The followers of Jesus have every reason for optimism in what looks like the darkest hour or the hardest ordeal.

Our reasons for optimism in Christ include the fact that Jesus came to save sinners (**1 Timothy 1:15, Luke 19:10**), including tax collectors and the very people who viciously persecuted his followers. Jesus came with the intention of saving sinners, and he finished what he came to do (**John 17:4, 19:28-30**). He made his gift of salvation freely available to all who will trust him. The fact that Jesus died for our salvation and then was raised from the dead by the power of God gives believers assurance that death holds no threat, no power, and we too will rise in immortal glory (**1 Thessalonians 4:14**).

Having finished his work in the flesh and overcome death, Jesus has received all authority in heaven and on earth (**Matthew 28:16-20**). He reigns in unimpeachable victory over every power in heaven and on earth (**Ephesians 1:17-23**) and will keep those who turn to him from the devil himself (**1 John 3:8, James 4:7**). In

Jesus's name, Christians have victory over sin and death (**Romans 8:1-2**) and over every opponent or force that might rise to the attack to pry the Lord's people out of his mighty hand (**Romans 8:31-39**).

Christians live with the assurance that the authority Jesus holds and the kingdom He rules will not be shaken and will never end, continuing through all generations until He comes again (**Daniel 2:44**, **Matthew 16:18** and **28:20**). He will always be with His followers, the Shepherd with His sheep, the merciful High Priest tending to our needs and calming our fears. The promise of He who died for our sins and rose in victory is that he will certainly hear and respond to everything we ask, helping us to understand his will and conform to it (**1 John 5:13-15**). The assurance of Jesus' help for his people in this world is bound up with the promise of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the deposit guaranteeing the rest of God's promises (**2 Corinthians 1:20-22**), the living water that wells up and overflows from the life of Christians to impact not only themselves but the world in which we live and move (**John 7:37-39**). With the help of the Holy Spirit, Christians can testify of Jesus with calm assurance in a chaotic world, not worrying or letting our hearts be troubled, looking forward with eternal optimism to the end of distress that God has promised to those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (**1 Corinthians 15:57-58**).*