

Quick Fix Apocalypse

Fr Thomas Ryden

August 17, 2025

Jeremiah 23:23–29; Psalm 82; Hebrews 12:1–14; Luke 12:49–56

Easy answers can get you into trouble. I have learned this lesson more than I would like to admit throughout my life, but what comes to mind is the time I nearly fell for a password scam involving my Roku streaming stick. For a while, all of our TV apps were hosted on our Roku streaming stick, it turned our dumb TV into a smart TV. And I was having some problems with it, so I decided to contact Roku technical support. And I trusted that Google could give me that information. This is where I went wrong. After searching for a number for Roku support, I dialed the first number that popped up, an 800 number that didn't look suspicious. My guard was down to the point that I even offered the "support tech" on the other end of the call my Roku username and password. It was only after I was informed that I now owed a monthly subscription fee to Roku, something that did not in fact exist, that I realized that I was being scammed. The person on the other end of the line got my password, was going to lock me out of my account, and then charge me a monthly fee to access that changed password. I hung up, changed my password myself as fast as I could, and thankfully escaped with only some embarrassment and a lesson. In my frustration and need for an answer, I went for the quickest and easiest seeming solution. And it almost cost me quite a bit. Getting the answer I wanted to hear soured very quickly when reality kicked in.

Jeremiah was not a prophet of easy answers. Jeremiah had been given a weighty task, to tell the people of Jerusalem of the disaster that was coming, a message that

got him death threats, beaten up, imprisoned, and thrown in a well.¹ But Jeremiah was not the only one in the prophetic game in town. There were others who had a more palatable message. With Jerusalem soon to be surrounded and sacked by the Babylonians, its people exiled and God's Temple burned, there were apparently some so-called prophets who wanted everyone to think that everything was going to be fine. It is these prophets, who say what the people want to hear and not what they have heard from God that God is speaking against in the passage we read this morning. Just a few verses prior to our reading, hear this description of these false prophets and their message:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'"²

The people of Israel had lost their way. It was the job of God's prophets voice to tell them of the consequences of the broken covenant. But as it always seems to be, those who are doing wrong prefer to listen to the voices that tell them that everything is going to be ok, that they are going to keep getting away with it, and that what they are doing is not so bad anyway.

The problem with these sorts of prophets is that they have become detached from God's actual word, the Scriptures. The focus has gone from the one who gives the

¹ See Jer 20:2; 26:8; 37:15; 38:6

² Jer 23:16-17

prophetic word to the prophetic word itself. God makes the distinction in verse 28: "Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully." God does not take the breaking of his covenant lightly, and those who listened to the flattering prophets will be in for a rude awakening when Babylon comes. They are like those of whom Jesus speaks in our Gospel reading, the signs of broken covenant with God are there - worship of false Gods, injustice against the poor and outcast, but yet they do not see the disaster that is coming.

Beware of a prophet who only whispers sweet words. The one who only tells you what you want to hear is not your friend. I am reminded of the character Wormtongue in the Lord of the Rings, who through flattery and lies manipulates the good King Theoden into a stupor of inaction, causing his lands to be vulnerable to the warring hordes of Saruman, who is the one pulling the strings attached to Wormtongue. For Theoden to do what is necessary for the good of his people, he has to be awakened from the slumber that the false word has put him in. He has to reject what he has become and return to the truth. But listening to Wormtongue is the easier path.

Much of what passes for Christian faith today is little more than American culture wrapped in Bible stories on the one side or a vague notion that all that is required of us is to "be a good person" and try not to offend anybody too much on the other. Either will lull us to sleep, confident in our own righteousness while failing to see the signs of the times all around us. "You hypocrites," Jesus says, "You know how to

interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

I remember a cartoon I saw a while ago, I don't remember where. It is a simple, one panel scene of a family, watching a broadcast of a fireworks show on their television. But also in frame is the open window of the house, outside of which, the very same fireworks show, in all its glory, is happening very visibly right from their yard. A modern retelling of this cartoon would undoubtedly have the family on the couch all individually watching videos of fireworks on their phone. This is what we do! We fall for the cheap imitation of the real thing. The fireworks on TV are safe, optimized, and packaged into neat, consumable snippets. The real fireworks are too big for us to see them all, they require us to be outside, and they might even be a little bit scary, but there is no comparison between the two.

So if Jesus tells us to look out, what do we look out for? How do we make sure we are ready? I have been listening to a fascinating podcast recently from Christianity Today, called *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, which is a look at the Satanic Panic of the 80s and 90s. It is not a show for kids or the faint of heart and I would recommend discernment before listening given the subject matter. With that caveat, here's what I wanted to say about it: While in no way denying that evil is real and active in this world, the show looks at some of the more notable cases of alleged Satanism in this time period and reveals how much of those accounts were found to not be true. Made up stories, kids manipulated into saying things happened that didn't, fears that boiled over into delusions. But at the same time, there was real evil happening among some of the leaders in the very institutions that were so up in

arms about these alleged incidents. When the problem is always centered out there among “those people” and not right here (in our own hearts), we deceive ourselves.

I’ve noticed an interesting thing that pops up frequently when Jesus is talking about the signs of the times, the second coming, or the end of the world. He often emphasizes the call to personal holiness and repentance as the primary action for his followers to take in light of the state of the world.

You can look at these passages later, but I want to quickly look at Matthew 24 and 25 in comparison with Luke 12 and 13, from which our Gospel reading comes today. Mark chapter 13 is also a parallel passage, but it closely resembles Matthew, so we will leave it to Matthew and Luke today.

In both passages, Jesus is talking about the end, the judgement of the world. We are firmly in the territory of apocalyptic teaching today. But what I want us to notice is how consistent Jesus is in how he tells his followers to act in light of the end and the troubles that he says will come.

We could spend a while in each of these passages, but I’d like to touch on them briefly so we can see what they are saying collectively. Matthew 24 begins with Jesus’ declaration that the Temple will be destroyed, and then goes on to list a host of things that will come to pass: false prophets claiming Jesus’ name, wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters and persecution of those who follow him. And then we get to the “so what” of this first section. In light of this, how should Jesus' followers live?

Verse 13: “The one who endures to the end will be saved.” In light of all of these extreme circumstances Jesus has one word for us: endure.

Skipping down to verse 36, Jesus cautions against the kind of end times forecasting we see far too much of these days, where he says that it is not for us to know the day or the hour, but we are to be like faithful servants who are found to be doing their master’s work when he returns, no matter when that may be (24:45-46). Chapter 25 begins with two parables, one of being ready for God’s return and the other, the Parable of the Talents, on the importance of being about our Father’s business with what he has given us. And if the nature of that business is not clear to us, Matthew 25 ends with Jesus’ description of the final judgement: what we do to the least is what we do to him.

The common thread we can trace through these passages is that despite whatever happens in the future, no matter how far from or near to we are to the final judgement, our focus should be on our own endurance and obedience to our Master. This is also the theme of Jesus’ apocalyptic teachings in Luke.

The passage before our gospel reading for today in Luke 12 uses the same image of servants waiting for their master to return, and that the ones who stay awake are the ones who are blessed. Then we have our passage today, with the personal and relational costs of following Jesus and the appeal to be watchful and pay attention to the signs of the times. Then, looking into Luke 13, we have the question of some Jews who were the victims of persecution at the hands of Pilate, a pretty apocalyptic scene, where the blood of these Judeans is mixed with the sacrificial blood in the

Temple. Jesus says to those around them that this sort of thing does not happen because of someone's sin, but that we should all repent. And next week, we will hear another final judgement question asked of Jesus, whether many will be saved or few. His response is to say that each one of us should focus on whether we are entering through the narrow gate into salvation.

With Jesus, it always comes back to a greater call to personal watchfulness and personal holiness. That is how we will be ready for the end of all things.

Is that what we hear today? Or do we hear that the real problem is not our own sin, but someone else's? Think of all the wars and rumors of wars that swirl around our news feeds every day. Think of all the ways we see evil triumphing over good and what is just taking a back seat. Do these things drive us to greater holiness? Or do we listen to the voices that tell us that the real problem belongs to someone else?

Beware of the quick fix version of the apocalypse that doesn't ask anything of you. Beware of the story where every problem in the world can be traced to some faraway enemy whose existence absolves us of any wrongdoing.

The false prophets in Jeremiah's day would tell you that everything was fine, that you didn't need to change because these Babylonians would be a distant memory soon. Today's false prophets may not tell you that everything is fine, but they will tell you that you don't need to change because it is all those other people who have the problem. Jesus tells you to repent and stay awake.

If that doesn't sound like a lot of fun, that is because it often isn't. But it is the way to life. I struggle sometimes to maintain my fitness routine. Often, there is no routine to speak of. Some people are blessed with the ability to find working out or going for a run to be a fun activity. I am not one of those people. But I have found that while I do not like exercise in the moment, I do like what it does for my day. I do like to be healthier and stronger.

The writer of Hebrews, coming off of the great list of faithful mothers and fathers in the faith that is chapter 11, people who were ready for the end that Jesus talks about, gets into an athletic-themed encouragement right after this list of heroes. "Run with endurance...Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet." Discipline is the sort of thing that keeps us ready and in the shape we need to be in to perform. It is why football players do walkthroughs, musicians rehearse for hours, and teachers obsess over lesson plans.

There might be any number of ways you feel that the world could be ending today. From the global scale all the way down to those many ways in which we can feel our personal worlds are ending. I daresay some things will continue to feel that way until Jesus does return to make things right. Our job is to be ready for him, to do his will with the hope of a sick world made well and a renewed view of ourselves and the people God longs to redeem. Be about your Master's business, because you do not know when he will return... and know too that your work is not wasted, because he is not far off, but is with us every step of the way, delighting in the little ways we choose obedience to him.