In the Gospel lesson that we read earlier from Luke, Jesus and his disciples were on their way visiting the great temple in Jerusalem. The disciples had no idea that this would be Jesus’ final trip into Jerusalem. Soon their spiritual leader would no longer be with them. As the disciples were approaching the temple, many of the disciples paused to admire its splendor and its magnificence…how luxurious and glamorous it may look all around. However, Jesus reminded his disciples that despite its splendor, none of these would last forever. One day this very same temple would be destroyed and crumbled, like everything else. It may last a couple of hundred years at best, but eventually it too will crumble and fall. But God’s temple will last forever.

Now obviously, Jesus was not only describing the physical temple but also alluding to his own imminent death, resurrection and his return. There would be a time to destroy and a time to rebuild, a time to suffer as well as a time to rejoice, as the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us. But no matter what, Jesus promised that despite the imminent trials, challenges, and uncertainties ahead, he would return in power and glory at the end. God would give us hope in the midst of fears, uncertainties and despairs. **We, human, can only see what’s before our eyes and within our lifetime, but God’s plan is eternal.** Jesus encouraged them to stand firm with their conviction no matter how difficult the trials and situations may be.

Once again, Jesus turned this into a teaching moment concerning the End of Time. All earthly infrastructure will eventually be destroyed, but God’s kingdom will soon be established and is here to stay. **We may stand in the midst of terrors and uncertainties at the present, but there is hope in the midst of such fears.** So the questions on everyone’s mind were...What is going to happen when “the end” does come? How will we know when it’s here and what can we do meantime in order to prepare for that day?

Instead of laying out all the details for the disciples concerning the future End Time, Jesus offered his disciples a few warning signs and advices, potential pitfalls that they must be on the lookout for.

1) **Beware of false prophets**[[1]](#footnote-1);

2) **Do not be terrified by things that might happen**[[2]](#footnote-2);

3) **Be opened to the leading of the Holy Spirit as it speaks to you**[[3]](#footnote-3); and last but not least,

4) **Stand firm and hold your course**[[4]](#footnote-4) even when the persecution and long suffering become too unbearable. In a few other translations, this last verse was translated as **“by your endurance (or patience), you will gain your soul (or your life).”**

Now Jesus was telling the disciples these warning signs not to frighten them or anything but instead place a sense of urgency upon his disciples, so this way they would not be caught off-guard. There is something that we can look forward to. Instead of living in constant fears and worries about our future, we shall be living in faith and stay on-course with our mission. Fix our eyes upon our future even through the darkest times of the present. Stand firm and remain hopeful when the day Christ does return to re-establish order in God’s kingdom.

During my recent trip to China, I had a chance to visit the Nanjing Massacre Museum. The Nanjing Massacre Museum was dedicated to those who were brutally slaughtered, raped, and beaten in the hands of Japanese Empire during WWII. It was estimated that more than 300,000 local Nanjing people alone were savagely killed in the span of about 6 weeks in December 1937 and January 1938. 300,000!!! This horrific genocidal massacre was often not known from the western world because it was overshadowed by the Holocaust event in Europe a few years later on. This WAS the “Holocaust” of the Chinese people in the east.

As I was walking through the exhibits, seeing the videos and photographs of the event, there was this complete silence imagining what horrors and fears that the people must have gone through. This must have felt like the living hell as people were captured into force labor, savagely beheaded by soldiers like it was a game, buried alive in mass graves, women were brutally gang raped and then eventually killed. I couldn’t fathom the level of atrocity and evil that one can impose upon another.

As visitors were coming into the museum, we were greeted by the opening exhibit hall, which was somewhat pitch dark, except for the spotlights illustrating the many photographs of the victims on the side of the wall. The images were powerful and no words could explain. In the background, we heard audio clips of some of the survivors re-telling their stories of what happened to perished loved ones.

At the end of the exhibit we were guided back outside with a reflection pool and a monument upholding a statue of a woman holding a child on one hand and a dove on the other. At the base of the monument, was the word for Peace (both in Chinese and in English). We were invited to not only reflect upon the historic human tragic events that happened to prevent this ever from happening again, but more importantly what lessons we must learn from them, eradicating evil, spreading love and glimmer of hope and peace for humanity in this world.

Just as Jesus taught his disciples about the imminent End of Time, as we read earlier, similar questions resonate in our hearts….How long will all these sufferings take place, when will they end? To be honest, no one can pin-point that for sure except God alone. There will be acts of terror, intimidations, and fears as perpetrated by these so called “false prophets” as they thrive upon our human emotions and fears.

As many of us have seen lately on the news, there are many places around the world (such as Hong Kong, Chile, and France) that are currently in the state of chaos with lawlessness, vandalism, bloodshed and violence, with no imminent end in sight. Even among the Christians in Hong Kong were asking these hard questions of when will all of these violence and social disorders end? How can we pray for peace and hope in the midst of fears and dangers? Even many family members were taking different sides of the situation. They agree to disagree with one another. They pray the prayers of the Psalmist in Psalm 13

***How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.***

In the midst of much fears of uncertainties and anxieties looming over us, Christ has once again reminded us that **our future is in God’s hand and not whoever is in power. God remains a sovereign God who is universally in control of all things. No matter what the outcomes, no matter how harsh the criticisms or hopeless our situations may become, we shall let our faith dictate our everyday lives, knowing that in life or in death we belong to God. We shall place our ultimate hope and trust in God’s hand and not by any human authority or standards.**

We live in a desperate time in a desperate world in need of God’s hope, grace and mercy. **We must pray** fervently upon God’s hope, mercy and deliverance of healing upon God’s people. **We must pray** for the Spirit of unity and that God’s will be manifested ultimately, on earth as it is in heaven. **We must pray** that God’s peace shall reign and triumph over any human hatreds, personal selfish gains, bigotry, hostilities, and fears. **We must pray** that our earthly leaders be obedient and submissive to the authority and the will of God. **We must pray** that they may pursue God’s purpose and not their own.

1 John chapter 4 reminds us that ***“there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”*** In times like these, when love seems hard to come by. Perhaps love is all we must salvage in order to overcome our fears. As Paul wrote to the early church in Colossus, regardless of what earthly rule and power that we might be fallen under, regardless of what trials, challenges, and even persecutions that we may face each day, our ultimate purpose of worship and allegiance belong to Christ and Christ alone. God is still in control. God remains faithful to the people. Thanks be to God for his assurance of peace and hope in the midst of our fears. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Luke 2:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 2:9* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Luke 2:14* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Luke 2:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)