

Through It All Jesus Remains

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Luke 21:5-28 ⁵ Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, ⁶ "These things which you see-- the days will come in which not *one* stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." ⁷ So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign *will there be* when these things are about to take place?" ⁸ And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He*,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them. ⁹ "But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end *will not come* immediately." ¹⁰ Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ "And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. ¹² "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. ¹³ "But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. ¹⁴ "Therefore settle *it* in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; ¹⁵ "for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. ¹⁶ "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. ¹⁷ "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. ¹⁸ "But not a hair of your head shall be lost. ¹⁹ "By your patience possess your souls. ²⁰ "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²² "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³ "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. ²⁴ "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. ²⁵ "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; ²⁶ "men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. ²⁷ "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power

and great glory. ²⁸ "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

The 1996 movie *That Thing You Do* supposedly tells the story of The Wonders. Near the end of the movie, the band is recording in a studio, but arguments have come to a head, and every member leaves except the drummer. The drummer sits there alone, feeling really dejected, when another musician gives him some advice: bands come and go; what's important is to keep playing.

In our text this morning, Jesus warns us that things will fall apart things far more important than a band. When these things happen, they are not reasons for us to be discouraged. Jesus describes the history of this world as a night of doubt and terror. Truly terrible and awful things will happen, but He tells us these events are not reasons for despair; instead, they are reasons for us to rejoice.

Look at the very last verse of our text:

28 "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

Remember Noah in the ark? That was a terrible event in which thousands, perhaps millions, were swept to their deaths, and the entire world was destroyed with them. Peter reminds us that the same flood which destroyed the wicked lifted Noah out of that evil world into a new, renewed one. In the same way, those who cling to the cross are lifted out of this wicked world into a new one.

The first thing Jesus discusses is the destruction of the temple.

The importance of that temple to the Jewish nation and faith cannot be overstated. The Jews, including the disciples, were so enamored with the temple that they couldn't imagine it coming to an end. It was the heart of their faith and their nation. Yet Jesus warns that it will all come to an end. Not one stone will remain upon another. It will utterly fall, just as was prophesied in the Old Testament.

In verse 22 of our text, Jesus refers to the destruction of the temple and the nation of Israel as:

22 "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

And in verse 24:

"Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles."

If we look back at our Old Testament reading from Malachi, we see similar language:

Malachi 4:1 — "The proud, yes, all who do wickedly, will be stubble."

Malachi 4:1 — "They will leave them neither root nor branch."

Malachi 4:3 — "You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet."

The people of Jerusalem were proud. They were proud of their temple and their nation. They refused to repent, despite John the Baptist's call and Jesus' miracles. They clung to the temple, refusing to acknowledge that with Jesus' coming, God no longer dwelled there in the way they had thought.

But Jesus is the stone the builders rejected. He is the foundation of the new temple—Immanuel, "God with us."

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:11:

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

The temple in Jerusalem was no longer necessary. But those who reject the true temple—Jesus—will perish along with the old structure.

The question we must ask ourselves is: what temples are we clinging to? What things have we set up in our hearts as more important than Jesus?

Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 3:12-13:

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire. The fire will test each one's work, to see what sort it is."

The church built on Jesus remains forever—not the building, but the believers gathered in His name. Jesus remains forever. If we cling to a church building or organization, those things will not last. But if we cling to Jesus, that will endure.

Things like this church, this organization, even the Synod of the CLC are good and useful, provided they serve Christ. But if they stop serving Him, we must be willing to let them go.

There is so much in this life we tend to cling to—our nation, our church, our identity, our family. It may feel like the world is ending if these things are destroyed. But Jesus remains. As long as we cling to Him, the rest can crumble away.

Another point Jesus makes is that Christians will be betrayed, delivered up, and killed for their faith:

Verses 12-13:

"But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony."

The Bible makes it clear that Christians will always be hated by the world and will face persecution. Jesus says that before the destruction of Jerusalem, before wars and earthquakes, the first thing that must happen is that His followers—His apostles and early Christians—will be delivered up and persecuted. This does not mean the end of the world, nor does it indicate that Jesus has failed to protect His church. Instead, it's an opportunity for them to witness.

Remember Peter and John before the Sanhedrin? Or Paul before Felix, Festus, and even Caesar? These were moments when believers had the chance to testify before kings and rulers. Their willingness to face death for their faith displayed the truth of their testimony.

Jesus shows us that persecution was something that had to happen from the very beginning. When John the Baptist was imprisoned, he wondered if Jesus was truly the Messiah. He even sent his disciples to ask, "Are You the one who is to come?" If Jesus truly is the Son of God, why was He allowing John's imprisonment? Likewise, when we are hated and persecuted, we might wonder why God isn't doing something about it.

But Jesus warns us in this passage that persecution is part of His plan. It will happen, and it is necessary. Just as fire refines metal, our trials and persecutions refine our faith and strengthen our witness.

Last Friday night, I used a leaf blower to stir the fire for the kids' evening event. As I blew on the fire, ashes were stirred up, and the flames grew hotter. When the world attacks the church, God can use that adversity to deepen our faith—making us burn ever brighter.

And yet, even when we are persecuted, Jesus gives us His promise:

Verses 17-19:

"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience, possess your souls."

This means that God pays close attention to us—so closely that not a single hair falls from our head unnoticed. Our suffering and persecution do not go unnoticed by Him. Though we may be hated, we are never forgotten.

There is so much more in this chapter that we cannot cover today. Jesus speaks of many false prophets, wars among nations and within the church, natural disasters, and diseases.

Verses 25-26:

"There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and on the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts will fail them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken."

This likely points not to literal celestial signs, but to the collapse of mighty political powers. Things we think are unbreakable, that will someday fail. When that happens, people will despair, thinking it's the end of the world. But we know better. Jesus is in control. He sits in the heavens, ruling over all things. These disasters are only a foreshadowing of the final judgment.

And here is His call to us:

Verse 28:

"When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

Jesus is coming again! When that day arrives, it will be the end of everything we currently know— not just the destruction of the temple or Jerusalem, but the earth itself will be burned up.

Many in Jerusalem clung to their temple and their nation and were lost with it. But we, by faith in Jesus, cling to Him, and we will not be lost when the world is destroyed. Like Noah, we will be lifted out of this evil world and delivered into a new one where righteousness dwells forever.

All the disasters and upheavals we see now serve as reminders of the final judgment to come. These are not reasons for despair but calls to lift up our heads because our Savior is returning and He is coming soon.

Amen.