

# “Your Redemption Is Drawing Near”: Jesus’ Words on the End of the World (Part 1)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>5</sup> And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, <sup>6</sup> “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” <sup>7</sup> And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” <sup>8</sup> And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. <sup>9</sup> And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

<sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. <sup>11</sup> There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. <sup>12</sup> But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. <sup>13</sup> This will be your opportunity to bear witness. <sup>14</sup> Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, <sup>15</sup> for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. <sup>16</sup> You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. <sup>17</sup> You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. <sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup> By your endurance you will gain your lives.

<sup>20</sup> “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. <sup>21</sup> Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, <sup>22</sup> for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. <sup>23</sup> Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. <sup>24</sup> They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

<sup>25</sup> “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, <sup>26</sup> people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

<sup>29</sup> And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>34</sup> “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

<sup>37</sup> And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. <sup>38</sup> And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him. (Luke 21:5–38)

## No Better Text

- A. We know that when we come to the Scriptures, wherever we are in the Bible, whatever verses we may be focusing on, it's going to be relevant to our lives in one way or another—God's word always is; it's "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12), right?
1. But I'll tell you, as I sat down in my office this past week to really dig into these verses here in [Luke 21](#) I just thought: It doesn't get any more relevant than this!
    - a. After all we've been through already together in 2020, and then coming right off of a grueling and fatiguing week with this election, where our nation has seemed to me at least to be treacherously close to just ripping apart at the seams—so much hatred, so much vitriol, so much polarization, so much back and forth with accusation, everyone thinking their team is right, their team is going to win; their team is the good guys.
      - i. Anyone else tired? I certainly am.
- B. Thinking back on this year, I can't even count how many times I've heard a news anchor or someone use the word "unprecedented." I began noticing a while back and it alarmed at first but now it's almost just sort of a running joke. How many more things could we face in 2020 that are "unprecedented"?
1. I've heard it used to describe the virus; to describe the dry lightning storm that moved through the bay and lit it up; to describe the wildfires, their size and ferocity—not just here in California but in places like Colorado and others; to describe the hurricanes in the east; and, of course, to describe the election; and on and on it goes . . .
- C. So now here's where I'm going with this. In view of these things, I would bet that almost every one of you has had a Christian friend or a family member (maybe not even a Christian) that's looked out at all of this and said to you: "Do you think this is the end of the world? Is this it? Do you think Jesus is coming back . . . soon? Is that what this is all about? Because this is crazy? This is 'unprecedented'."
1. Perhaps no one's asked you this, but you've been thinking it yourself. "I better study me some end times in the Bible, because I think I'm living in them."
- D. Well, if that's you, I've got good news for you! There's perhaps no better text (at least in the gospels) to be considering than the one we have before us when it comes to the question of the end of the world and the return of Christ and things.
1. Indeed, this is precisely what the disciples are here asking Jesus about. And the whole chapter is His long, glorious, albeit complex (and even, at times, confusing), answer.

- E. I've wrestled this past week with how best to preach through this chapter. I think I may have four or five sermons for us—we'll just slowly kind of make our way through.
  - 1. Today's message is really just to get us started. We're going to be looking at vv. 5-9 in particular and I think this will really set the stage for what will come in later weeks.
    - a. So three things we're going to see here in these opening verses: (1) A Devastating Prophecy (vv. 5-6); (2) A Pressing Question (v. 7); and (3) A Complicated Answer (vv. 8-9).

## (1) A Devastating Prophecy (vv. 5-6)

### The Temple's Adornments

- A. In v. 5 we read that "some [presumably disciples or followers of some sort] were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings . . ."
- B. Now I wanted to pause on that for a moment, because, I must say, I do think it quite interesting that such a note comes right on the heels of this lesson Jesus has been trying to get through to His disciples in the preceding verses (Luke 20:45-21:4).
  - 1. You remember, Jesus was there calling them to be wary of overvaluing the external, the appearance of things. In particular, He's been talking about how the scribes, though they look good on the outside, on the inside they're full of dead men's bones. There's nothing to see there.
  - 2. Instead He directs their attention to this poor widow. And we learn from her that real, authentic, God-pleasing religion is concerned first and foremost not with what's outside a person but what's inside, in the heart. Externally this woman had no adornments and not much to offer, and yet Jesus says because she's given God her heart she's given infinitely more than these scribes or rich donors that had just paraded through the temple making a bunch of empty noise.
    - a. Here with her on the floor in the temple is true beauty and magnificence and worth.
- C. Remember too, Jesus had just come through a day or so ago and rebuked those conducting matters in the temple saying you've made it a "den of robbers" (Luke 19:46). "Oh sure it looks pretty on the outside, but everything's all wrong on the inside. Your hearts are far from God, and you manipulate religion and the temple for your own benefit."
  - 1. But here these disciples are yet again mesmerized by the externals, applauding the beauty and sheer magnitude of the temple—looking again to the outside while neglecting what's going on within.
- D. Now, in their defense, this second temple as it had been rebuilt in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and then later enhanced by Herod the Great, was a magnificent spectacle to behold.

1. Indeed, one commentator writes: “The beauty and size of Herod the Great’s Temple Mount exceeded that of most of the seven wonders of the world” (ESVSB).
2. It occupied approximately 1/6 of the entire city of Jerusalem, encompassing approximately 1.5 million square feet.
3. It’s foundation walls were constructed using massive stones, one of the largest found being some 45 feet long, 11.5 feet high, and 12 feet thick, weighing in at over a million pounds. That’s a stone bigger than a school bus and weighing 40 times as much! And Jewish historian Josephus seems to indicate there were some back in the day even bigger than this.
4. Another commentator writes: “The magnitude of the Temple Mount and the stones used to construct it exceed in size any other temple in the ancient world” (PNTC).
5. Which is why Roman historian Tacitus described it as “immensely opulent” (Hist. 5.8.1).

a. And it’s why these disciples stopped to take in and praise it’s beauty.

E. But Jesus is not impressed. It’s as if He’s looking at something else entirely. Oh sure it’s beautiful on the outside, but in all the areas that really count, things have gotten ugly.

1. So He turns and looks at His disciples and says almost matter-of-factly: “Give it 40 years, and it’s all coming down!” “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone another that will not be thrown down” (v. 6).

a. It’s an historical fact. In 70 A.D. the Roman army under Titus razed Jerusalem and its temple to the ground.

## A “Devastating Prophecy”?

A. Now, I say this would have been a “devastating prophecy” for the Jews, even these Jewish disciples. Why?

1. Because it’s tragic to see such a magnificent structure destroyed? Not exactly.

B. To get why this would be so devastating we have to again remember what the temple stood for in Jerusalem, for the people of Israel.

1. To them the temple was everything. It was the sign of YHWH’s presence with them. It was what united them as a people. Their hope and lives were tethered to it. It was the very heart and center of the Jewish people—and they believed it to be really the heart and center of the entire world.

C. I’ve been reading in the book of [Numbers](#) for my devotions and you see there in the beginning how God tries to establish such a thing with them. It’s profound.

1. When He’s telling the various tribes how and where to camp around the tabernacle and things (which is really just the precursor to the more permanent temple structure), He organizes them in such a way that the tabernacle of His presence is always at the center, whether they’re camping or they’re on the march. It’s the heart and center of who they are as a people, as a nation.

- a. And Jesus is here saying: “Soon and very soon, it will be no more”?!
  - i. That’s devastating! “What about our identity? What about our national hope? What about the rest of the world? It’s over!” As far as the Jews were concerned that would be the end of the story.
- D. Can you relate? You build your life on something. Your hope’s all intertwined with something. And then it’s just gone, reduced to rubble on the ground. A spouse. A job. A political party or president.
  - 1. I imagine some may even feel this way because of how the elections turned out. I heard the rhetoric on both sides. The one side was saying, if our opponent wins, America as we know it will be gone. And the other side was saying precisely the same thing.
    - a. So no doubt some Trump supporters are feeling it. Devastated. No more hope. No more nation. It feels like the end of the world. And if Trump had won, it would be many Biden supporters then feeling that way.
- E. So what now?

## (2) A Pressing Question (v. 7)

“Teacher . . .”

- A. These disciples, no doubt distressed and anxious, perhaps a bit panicked because of what they just heard, respond to all this, I’m happy to report, by doing the right thing. They don’t push back on Jesus. They push towards Him.
  - 1. And I love how they first address Him: “Teacher . . .” (v. 7). Did you catch that? There’s gold there for any who would dig in a bit.
    - a. When you don’t initially like what you’re hearing God say or what you’re seeing God do, you don’t argue and bicker and fight with Him, you draw near and ask Him to teach you: “Show me what you’re doing. Help me understand . . . ‘Teacher . . .’”
- B. We’ll return to this idea in a little bit, but for now, notice these disciples’ question: “And they asked him, ‘Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?’” (v. 7).
  - 1. It’s this question, really, as to the “when” and the “what” that really sets up the rest of this chapter. It’s all Jesus’ response to this.
- C. And remember, for the Jew here, they are essentially asking, not just when might the temple be destroyed, but when will the world end? Because from their perspective it seemed only logical that the events would surely be one and the same. If God’s presence goes, the world goes with it.
  - 1. Indeed, as Matthew’s account, he records their question like this: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).

### (3) A Complicated Answer (vv. 8-9)

#### Why “Complicated”?

A. Now why do I say that Jesus’ answer in all that follows is complicated?

#### Reason #1: Because No One Knows

- A. Jesus Himself actually tells us in [Matt 24:36](#) that “concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”
1. This isn’t to say you can’t know certain things to be on the lookout for. Indeed, we must be on the lookout for some of the stuff Jesus mentions here. We must, as He says at the end of [Luke 24](#), “stay awake at all times” (v. 36), be on our guard, be on the lookout. The day of Jesus’ arrival doesn’t have to come upon us “suddenly like a trap” (v. 34).
  2. So He doesn’t mean we can’t know anything about the end of the age. But He does mean to say, I think, that we can’t know the day or the hour or the chain of events precisely. The particulars will always inevitably evade us. We shouldn’t expect to have the timeline perfectly worked out without question. It doesn’t work that way. Jesus didn’t intend for it to.
    - a. We can get bits and pieces and there are signs and things to look for, but we can’t get much beyond that and we should be a bit cautious with those who claim they have.

#### Reason #2: Because the Two Events Are Distinct And Yet Related

- A. This returns to what I was saying earlier. What the Jews would have understood as one cataclysmic event—the destruction of the temple and the consequent end of the age, Jesus sees as two. The events are not conflated into one, they are distinct.
1. And yet still they are related. And this is what makes interpreting His discourse here so complicated. While Jesus doesn’t see these two as one and the same event historically, He does see the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem as a type and foreshadow of the judgment that will come upon the whole world at the end of time. It’s a micro-picture of that end-time macro, cosmic, universal reality.
    - a. So as He goes on to answer their question, then, He has two horizons in view—a near horizon and a distant one: 70 A.D. with the destruction of the temple (near); and the end of the world (distant). But, at times, because the two are related to one another (again, with the latter typified and pictured in the former) we can’t always tell precisely which horizon, which event, He’s referring to.
      - i. Is He talking about what will happen when judgement comes for Jerusalem, or when judgment comes for the world, or maybe both? It can be a little bit confusing.

- B. But I think He helps us anticipate this with that last line of [v. 9](#) there where He says: “the end will not be at once.”
1. In other words, the destruction of the temple will not coincide with the end of the age. Those events are distinct. And yet they are related. In fact, the destruction of the temple is in many ways the beginning of the end. Or as He puts it in [Matt 24:8](#): “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”
    - a. Anyone feel like your life has been filled with birth pains lately?!

## Two Application Points

- A. Now it’s very possible I’ve already lost you, even in my attempt to try to simplify these things! Rest assured we will try to work this out more in the weeks to come, but for now I simply want to settle a bit more into [vv. 8-9](#).
1. Let’s read those verses again: “<sup>8</sup> And he said, ‘See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, “I am he!” and, “The time is at hand!” Do not go after them.’<sup>9</sup> And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”
- B. Now all I want to do is draw out two application points for us from this and then we’ll wrap things up . . .

### Application Point #1: Do Not Be Led Astray

- A. In [v. 8](#) there we see that Jesus is telling His disciples to watch out for false Christs, false prophets, guys that are going to come in His name and try to deceive. Do not be led astray by them.
- B. You see, Jesus begins His answer this way, because He knows: When times get tough, when we’re really struggling, when we’re all up in a panic . . . we’re vulnerable to false Christs and false prophets and false teachers.
1. I mean think about it, when you’re anxious and afraid, don’t you just want to cling to anything that seems hopeful even though, deep down you know it might not be exactly right?
- C. Again, not to belabor this, but I think we see this going on in our nation right now. I don’t mean to offend, I think this is happening on all sides. But we’re talking a lot these days about fake news and fact checking and conspiracy theories because I think right now we’re particularly susceptible to that sort of thing . . . to lies.
1. Somebody can post a false claim or something on social media and it may just go viral if enough people think it’s true, if enough people want it to be true. And then, once it’s made the rounds and influenced your perspective on things, it hardly matters if it’s true anymore or not.

- a. And now you watch yourself, you're going to lean towards those things you want to be true. You're going to grab ahold of it and believe it, because your heart is there, even if the facts aren't there.
  
- D. And that's what can happen with our religious stuff too. When we're in a panic, when life is hard, when we really want something to be true, we'll find people to tell us it's in the Bible. We'll find people to help us justify it. We'll find Christian leaders that will tickle our ears. We'll give our trust to false Christs and prophets.
  - 1. I thought of what the Jews were tempted to do during their time of exile in Babylon. You remember this? God has Jeremiah send a letter to those there and it reads: "<sup>8</sup> [T]hus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,<sup>9</sup> for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD" (Jer. 29:8–9).
    - a. You see these guys were saying: "God's going to break the yoke of the king of Babylon and bring you back in no time at all, don't you worry!" And they were buying it, because they wanted it to be true. "Jeremiah's saying 70 years. Hananiah's saying two. Om . . . we're going with Hananiah on this."
  
- E. And Jesus knows the early church, in the near horizon there, they are going to be prone to do this, especially as things get hard.
  - 1. And for us as well in the distant horizon, as the tribulations continue to increase, we're susceptible to being led astray by guys that just tell us what we want to hear, to gain a following, get your money or whatever.
  
- F. This is why I said we'd return to that idea of calling Jesus "**Teacher**" especially when we're in times like these.
  - 1. Let me encourage you, you're worried, you're panicked, I get it. Jesus gets it. Run to Him and ask Him to guide you, help you interpret. Open His word, let Him speak to you about the plans He has for this world and for you and things.
  
- G. You know that's what's so amazing about that passage there in [Jer 29](#). I didn't read the whole thing, but a lot of people know [Jer 29:11](#)—they've got it embroidered on their pillows or engraved on their coffee mugs or whatever. We love that. "**For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.**"
  - 1. Now, remember, this comes in the same letter where Jeremiah says: "Don't go after the false prophets who say your time in exile will be short. It won't . . . But don't let that discourage you either, God is not done. He's got good plans for you. Hang on."
    - a. We don't want to hear it's going to take 70 years. We don't want to deal with it. "This is your good plan? Exile in Babylon, no thank you!" But if we let God teach us, if we receive what is true whether we immediately like it or not, He will bring good from it.



H. And this really leads to the last thing I wanted to say . . .

## Application Point #2: Do Not Be Terrified

A. In v. 9 Jesus says: “Listen, you’re going to hear about wars, you’re going to hear about tumults, everything’s going to feel like it’s unraveling around you, but I’m telling you do not be afraid . . .”

1. And we say: “Why? How? On what basis? My life is falling apart.”

B. He goes on to say: “for these things must first take place . . .” “Must.” It’s the Greek word *dei* and it’s used often in Luke to refer to the sure and certain plan of God.

1. It’s used most often when talking about how Jesus “must” go to the cross to suffer and die (cf. Luke 13:33; 17:25; 24:7, 26, 44), in fulfillment of the Scriptures. It’s God’s plan.

a. “Oh I know it looks horrible for the moment, it looks like God is totally out of control, but He’s got it handled and He’s up to good in it. That’s why you do not need to be terrified. These things must take place and then the end will come.”

i. As He says down in v. 28: “[S]traighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” “I’m up to good in this, even if you don’t see it now. Everything feels like it’s trembling and shaking but I am telling you, you are standing on the bedrock of the divine plan, He’s got you, don’t be afraid.”

C. And of course that’s what He does with the destruction of the temple, right? To the Jews it seemed the end of their hope, but truly God is moving the plan of redemption forward.

1. The temple had served its purpose. The One to whom it all was pointing has arrived.

a. That’s why He says in John 2:19: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” And John says, “He was speaking about the temple of his body” (2:21).

b. Jesus is the presence of God in our midst, Emmanuel God with us.

c. Jesus is our high priest going into the most holy place of heaven to make atonement for us.

d. Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

e. Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple and all it stood for. That’s why when He breathes His last on that cross, the veil that separated man from God was torn in two and we can now come running into the throne room of God anticipating not wrath but grace.

f. Jesus is the heart and center of the new humanity, the church, and He will be for all eternity!

i. We no longer need the temple with all its gigantic stones and beautiful adornments. We need Jesus.

- (1) And He's right here. Reminding us that whatever it is that's hard right now in your life, whatever the wars and tumults may be, whatever dreams of yours now feel like they've just been reduced to rubble, listen: He's still up to good in it. The story, the world, it's going to end well for those who trust Him.