

Solid To The End

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[0:00] Let us pray. Lord God, Heavenly King, we thank you for the privilege of gathering here on this Lord today to hear your word.

I pray, Lord, that you would give me your words to say and all that I would say would be from you. I pray, Lord, that you would give all of us here to listen to what you have to say.

May we be encouraged. May we be drawn closer to you, Lord, upon the hearing of your word. May we leave here, Lord, deeper in love with you and more committed to follow you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Can I encourage you to open your Bibles to Luke 21? We're going to be in verse 5 to 19 this morning.

It's on page 1046 of your pew Bible. Now, our gospel reading this morning was unplanned. Well, at least, when I say it's unplanned, I don't think anybody thought, oh, this is the perfect one for right after the elections.

[1:10] But providentially, it is appropriate for this moment that we are in. Having just participated in an election with the expectations and hopes that comes with voting and the anticipation that comes with that as well, about seeing who gains office and who gets kicked out.

Perhaps less people than you want to be kicked out were kicked out at this election. And some other people might think the other way. But with all those hopes and expectations that it signifies, I think this gospel reading has something to say to us as believers in the world that we live in.

This gospel reading calls us to ask ourselves this important question. Where? In whom? Or in what do we hope?

Now, we are here in Luke 21 in the journey with Jesus. Remember that we've been following, we've been joining with Jesus in our passages in Luke.

And here we are, we remember that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. But he's already made it to Jerusalem. Early in chapter 19, he arrived in Jerusalem. He's made his triumphant entry into the city.

[2:24] He's now going, as his habit in the week before his passion, going daily, early in the morning to the temple to teach and to be confronted often by the keepers of the temple, the rulers of the temple, who would already conspire in their hearts to kill him.

It is in this context that we have our passage in Luke 21. It says here in verse 5, that while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings.

Now, people were gathered around Jesus. They were gathered around Jesus. And they were speaking admiringly of the temple. It was a magnificent temple. It was.

They were right to admire it. It was a wonder of architecture in its day. It had been built 20 years before Jesus' birth by Herod the Great.

It was double the size of the previous temple built after the return from exile. It had magnificent white marbled columns and gold-plated facade.

[3:39] It was a beauty to behold. And the Jews rightly took pride in its beauty and its grandeur because it was the center of their religious and civic life.

But it had long ceased to be the place where true worship, the kind of worship that is pleasing to God, it had long ceased to be the place where true worship is conducted.

It was a den of thieves, a place in which God, the God incarnate, comes and he is not recognized, nor worshipped. but rather rejected.

So Jesus, upon hearing the admiring words about the temple, tells them the truth about what will come to pass. He said to them, As for these things that you see, that is, all this beauty that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

Jesus' response to their ponderings is to give them some hard pills to swallow. I want to imagine, imagine for a second, someone saying to you today, no stone of the Capitol building or no stone of the White House will be left upon another.

[5:01] It would all be blown to smithereens. Imagine hearing that. Such a pronouncement will be seen by many as highly offensive. Maybe even, you might call, you know, Homeland Security on such a person.

It's butting on treason to make those kind of pronouncements. Because it's not just any building. It is, you will have understood the importance of these buildings to the civic life and the political life and the life of our nation.

The temple is, all of that, wrapped up, both religious and civic. But Jesus says, not one stone will be left on another. Now, Jesus is not speaking here to them as a shock jock or a wannabe terrorist. He's foretelling, he's prophesying what will take place in the future. That's what Jesus is saying. He's prophesying what will happen to this temple and to Jerusalem in the future.

And I think the disciples and the crowd around him understood this. So they asked Jesus for the signs. What are the signs for when this national tragedy will take place?

[6:21] When and what are the signs that we should be looking for? But Jesus doesn't answer them in a way that is necessarily soothing or reassuring?

Now, what are they asking for? They're asking for signs of the end times. Because to them, the destruction of the temple is tantamount to end time sort of level destruction.

It is a calamitous event, the destruction of the temple. They understood what that would have meant for their lives and their nation. So they asked Jesus to tell them the signs that they must watch for to know when the end is at end.

But Jesus in turn, Jesus in turn tells them, he tells them not to look for signs of the end, but to look for signs of the age. What's the difference?

You might ask. Jesus did not go in, Jesus did go on at the end of the chapter to tell them about what the signs of the end will be. He says that, he says to them in verse 27 of this chapter that when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that the end is near.

[7:35] this happened in the years leading up to 70 AD and eventually led to the prophecy that Jesus made. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was blown to smithereens to use sort of modern language and no stone was left on top of another as Jesus prophesied.

But that's not what Jesus really wants them to look for. They're asking for those signs where Jesus said be more careful to watch for the signs of the age.

He wants them to be even more watchful for that. Then there are three signs of the age that he wants them to be on watch for. The first one is false messiahs. The second one is calamity.

Wars, disasters, and pestilences. And the third one is persecution. These three signs of the age, Jesus says be watchful for them. Knowing the signs of the age will allow us not to be deceived when those who want to lead us away come.

If we remember that Jesus has told us what the age that we live in will look like, then we will not be anxious. Rather, we will remember that he is still sovereign over all of it.

[8:59] and he is at work even through all of it to bring about all of history to his purpose to end.

That's why Jesus tells us to work for the signs of the age. I want us to see then that Jesus is warning here for his disciples to be alert and aware is also a warning for us, for you and I.

Because, guess what? We live in the same age that Jesus is talking about. What are the signs of it? The age that Jesus is talking about is between his death, resurrection, and ascension, and his second coming.

We are still in the same age between his ascension and his second coming. So the things he calls the first disciples to watch for is the things he's calling us to be on alert and watch for as well.

Let's look at the first sign of the age. Jesus says to them, be careful not to be led astray by pretenders, by false messiahs, claiming to have the power to save, the power to save the world, the power to roll back the decay and deterioration of the culture.

[10:28] Jesus says that these false pretenders, these false messiahs, will arise. They might come to us as political saviors, promising to lead a movement back to an Edenic past, or they might come to us as religious saviors, promising to lead people into false utopias.

But Jesus warns us, don't be misled. See that you are not led astray. Do not go after them. Now, many have indeed come since Jesus' ascension who have claimed to be the Messiah.

Many have come and said to God's people, the time, that is the end of time, is that end. There has been no shortage of such people.

Just go online and Google false messiahs or people with messianic claims, and you'll see countless ludicrous claims, after claims, after claims, of people saying they're messiahs, and getting a following.

And what of those who claim they know when the end time will come? Harold Camping comes to mind. Some of you might be familiar with that name. I believe that he had four or five predictions of the end times.

[11:59] The first was in 1994, and then he moved the goal post, and the last two were in 2012. Mr. Camping died in 2013, at 92 years of age.

None of his predictions came to pass. But many, many were led astray by these pretenders, by these false messiahs, because they did not heed the word of the Lord here.

Do not go after them, Jesus says, for they will lead you astray. They will lead you away from the narrow way and the narrow door that leads to salvation.

Do not go after them. And the second sign of the age that Jesus tells us about is that there will be constant calamities, wars, natural disasters, and pestilences.

Verse 9, and when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, Jesus says, but these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.

[13:13] Hear Jesus' word there. Then he said to them, nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places, famines and pestilences, and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

Jesus said there will be no end to wars, disasters, and pestilences. Think for a second.

Since the first century, when Jesus said these things, up till now, consider for yourselves the advances in technology.

Consider the advent of democratic governing systems. We like to tell ourselves we are more civilized, more advanced, more cultured, more democratic than the people before us.

Yet, there is no end to wars. We've not come to figuring that out. There's no end to famines. Nations still rise against nations, people against people.

[14:36] We still kill one another and inflict unimaginable horrors on one another. There are still pestilences. How far has our technological advances protected us from disasters?

Hurricanes and earthquakes are still a regular part of our existence. You might say, at least we've gone past the days of plagues. But then again, the war just came out of a pandemic.

Now, this isn't an attempt by me to just be doom and gloom for the sake of being doom and gloom. No, it's an attempt by me to be political.

I say all of these only to point out the irrefutable truth of Jesus' words about the signs of the age that we live in.

Jesus was right about the age that we live in. He warned us, he warns us, war give way to new wars, disasters to new disasters, famine to new famines, on and on and on.

[15:57] It goes. Many Christians, I think, have this sense that we will usher in a utopian world with perfect economic systems, societies with no crimes, no downward spiral into godlessness in the culture.

Some Christians imagine that we can attain this utopia on this side of eternity. But Jesus cautions that lie with these words by saying that these are going to be the signs of the age that you live in, so get used to it, be aware of it, do not be surprised by them.

These will be the constant markers of a fallen world, marked by sin and rebellion. Jesus goes on and gives us the third sign of the age, persecution.

Look there in verse 12, but before all this, 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 governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it, therefore, in your minds, not to meditate beforehand, out to answer, for I will give your mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

[17:33] You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends and some of you will be put to death.

You will be hated by all for my name's sake, but not a hair of your head will perish by your endurance.

You will gain your lives. persecution will be the sign of the age. Since the world hates God, you must expect that the world will hate you.

This is clear right from the start, isn't it? Within days of Jesus saying these very words, Jesus was brought up before the Sanhedrin, the religious rulers, and he was brought before King Herod, and then he was brought before Governor Pilate, and then he was crucified.

Our Lord does not call us to walk a path that he has not walked on ahead of us. Remember that. Jesus says these things, and then days after, he walked the path.

[18 : 56] And the same things happened to the apostles. And after the apostles, many of the saints in the early church walked the same path.

The same things are happening today in many areas of the world to our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are delivered up to authorities to be questioned, tortured, for his name's sake.

Jesus says many of you will have your families, neighbors, and friends turn on you and betray you. Some of you they will put to death, Jesus says. Perhaps this might be a good time to examine why you are following Jesus.

Why are you here? Perhaps it might be a good time to ask yourself, is he worth following?

Remember earlier in Luke, his warning to those who will come after him, to count the cost of discipleship.

Count the cost. Well, have you counted the cost? Jesus tells us the truth of what it means to follow him, to be called by his name.

[20 : 16] Now, one thing you will not hear, you will not hear the sellers of the prosperity gospel preach from this text. you will not hear the messianic pretenders out there tell you this reality of life.

They will not. They will tell you of false hopes and false utopias in order to lead you away from the Lord. And you will not hear it in the world out there either.

If you go out in the world, the secular humanists also peddles the same lie, the lie of perpetual human progress.

Or maybe it's the other side of the coin that you see in the world. The lie of heart of despair and nihilism.

Think about the world ideology and world systems out there. the communist peddles this lie of by just human collective we're going to achieve progress and improve society.

[21 : 31] How did that pan out? This might offend you, but the capitalist peddles the same lie.

That by a free market, we will solve all the problems of the world and usher in a prosperity. Now, I agree with Churchill about capitalism is the best of the worst systems that any human being can offer.

But there is no lasting utopia in any human system. That's the point I'm trying to make to you here.

The scientist does the same by human progress, technology.

we may attain this utopia. All of them speak of human progress and they're all toiling like our fathers did at the Tower of Babel, thinking that by their human effort, they can touch the face of God.

It's the same old lie we've told ourselves time after time that we can, without divine intervention, make things better, make things right.

[22 : 49] But the Christian, the disciple of Christ, knows that there is only one way by which redemption and wholeness can be ushered into the world.

There is only one Savior of the world who by his death on the cross has redeemed the world. And it is only he that can come to restore all things, to finish the work he began and continues in his church.

We talked downstairs about the second coming in our series about the works, the personal works of Jesus Christ. That is what I hope, that's the ground of our hope.

It is in Jesus Christ who will come the Savior of the world to redeem all things, to restore all that is broken. That is what the Christian looks to.

Christians are not to participate in a naive optimism of the world. Neither are we to live in abject despair and nihilism.

[24 : 08] Christian discipleship is the call to a clear headed realism that knows that things in this world will not get better, cannot get better because of our sinful rebellion and because of the fall.

That these things are signs of the age that we live in, that Jesus speaks of. But they are just signs of this age because we know that is an age to come that our Lord and Savior and Redeemer is coming to usher in.

So we look to that. We fix our eyes on that. Brothers and sisters, we cannot give in to naïve optimism or abject despair.

We are not a doom and goon people. We are people of hope. Remember, to be in Christ is to be in possession of an unquenchable hope.

And Jesus promises us, he promises us that through these signs of the age that we will see false messiahs, heretics, calamities, persecution.

[25 : 27] Jesus promises that he will be present with us in the midst of the storm. Look there in verse 15. I will give you a mouth and a wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

Remember, remember the book of Acts. Remember the bravery and eloquence of Peter and John before the rulers of the temple, of Stephen and of Paul.

Remember church history, martyrs like Polycarp, and Perpetua and Felicity young teenage girls. And what of Latimer and Ridley?

And what of as recently as 2015, the martyrdom of the 21 Coptic Christians who were mercilessly killed and stood facing death without renouncing their Lord.

Remember the bravery of those who stood for the truth of the gospel when all was on the line.

Remember Jesus' word. I will be present with you.

[26 : 40] I will give you the mouth, I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand. I will give you courage and bravery in the midst of it. There's some promises ours as well.

And Jesus says, I will give you all of this. Why? Verse 13, because it will be your opportunity to bear witness. He says to us, when we find ourselves being persecuted, Jesus says, it will be an opportunity to bear witness to the faith that we profess.

Yes. How much has the church grown to the blood of the martyrs, the persecution of the church?

This is Jesus' prophecy. This is Jesus' prophecy regarding his church. But I hope that as you see this, you're probably warning to yourself, this is a church under siege.

This is a church in turmoil. But I actually, I hope you will see, that's why I asked us to remember the book of Acts and the early church history and sins that have gone before us.

[28 : 01] Look at all the empires that have come and gone. Look at the kingdom of our Lord and Savior. It is unconquerable.

It has not been defeated. It goes on and on. And I know it's not readily apparent to us in the face of the signs of the age.

church. But we are triumphant. The church of God is a triumphant church. It is a victorious church that batters down the gates of hell, which cannot prevail against its advance.

I wonder if you ever thought about that phrase that Jesus says when he says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not be able to prevail, maybe withstand it. often we think of it as a defensive posture.

But actually you think about it, the gates of hell will not be able to withstand my church, Jesus says. It's the enemy that is behind the world. We are the one advancing with the truth of the gospel.

[29 : 08] And Jesus says the gates of hell will not be able to withstand it. We're not under siege.

We're not behind walls. We go out with the gospel. And Jesus promises us, brothers and sisters, nothing will be able to stand in opposition.

This is a picture of a triumphant church. But I readily admit that it isn't the kind of triumph that the world looks at and think of triumph. It is the Christ-like path to victory.

It is the road of humiliation. It is a road of suffering. It is the path our Lord took himself to his exaltation and glorification.

So we must be ready then as this church to walk the same path. I think the church in the West, we've enjoyed multiple decades of peace and prosperity and affluence.

And thanks be to God for his mercies and allowing us to enjoy decades of that. but perhaps we have turned our gaze away from Christ who called us and we've clung to our comfort and our power and our influence over and above Jesus Christ and his gospel.

[30 : 32] will and as much as that is our disposition, we must repent and turn back to Jesus.

Now I'm not asking that we disengage from the world. We need Christians to be active in every sphere and aspect of our society.

we need Christians to engage the world, not to go off into little silos. We need Christians who will faithfully stand out in the market square and live out their faith faithfully.

Hear the word of our Lord in John 16:33. I have said these things to you, Jesus says, that in me you may have peace.

Jesus promises us peace. But it's peace in the midst of what? He says, he continues, in the world you will have tribulation. You will have tribulation.

[31:40] But take heart, Jesus says, I have overcome the world. Take heart, they are Christians. even as you see the signs of the age, even as you see the pretenders, wolves in sheep's clothing, don't be led astray by them.

Don't be misled. Take heart, dear Christian, even as you see the unending calamity of the world that surrounds us. Don't be anxious.

Do not give in to despair because of it. our Lord has overcome the world. And take heart, dear Christians, when you are persecuted for his name's sake, knowing that the persecution will come, remain steadfast.

Don't give up. Take heart, you are on the winning side. God, he has overcome the world. Look at Jesus' word in verse 18 as he closes this verses.

Jesus says in verse 18, not a hair of your head will perish. Now, I want us to understand verse 18 in light of the previous verses.

[33:06] It cannot mean that you will not endure physical harm. It cannot mean that no physical harm will come to you. Why can it not mean that?

Because look in verse 16b. It says, some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. So, Jesus is not promising here in verse 18 that you would not be in danger.

But then what does it mean? What does verse 18 mean? I think it means that no matter what befalls you in this world, no matter what happens to you. Jesus is saying, you are mine.

I am with you. It is my battle and I will see it true and I will bring you through. That's the promise that Jesus makes.

I think there's a parallel in verse 18 and Luke 12 verse 7. Jesus says in Luke 12, earlier in Luke chapter 12, even the hairs of your head are all numbered, Jesus says.

[34:14] Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows. Jesus says to his disciples, you are of value. In the context that Jesus says that in chapter 12, you tell them, do not fear those who will kill the body.

In chapter 12, verse 4 and 5. do not fear those who will kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do. Do not fear those who will kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do.

But I warn you, I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him who after he is killed has authority to cast into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. Jesus says, don't kill those people, don't kill the world, all they can do, all they can do is kill the body.

Live in fear of the one who has charge of your soul and your eternity. So the key then in verse 18 is, not a hair of your head will perish.

[35:30] The key word there is perish. Jesus says to his own, I will see you through even death. I will preserve your soul.

You are mine. I have conquered death in the grave on your behalf. Have no fear. This is why he then calls us in verse 19 to endure.

Jesus says, by your endurance. that is, by your faithfulness to Jesus as your Lord, by your steadfastness to his word, by your obedience to him, no matter the cost, you will gain your lives. How then can you endure in the face of all that Jesus has said would be the signs of our age? God, you can only do so, you can only endure if Jesus is your hope.

So I ask you, brothers and sisters, this morning, where have you placed your hope? I hope it is in Jesus, and not in false messiahs peddling a false gospel that cannot save.

[36:46] Let us pray. Let us pray. O God of unchangeable power and light eternal, look favorably upon the body of your whole church, and by your eternal providence accomplish the salvation of man, that all the world may see and know that what was fallen has been lifted up, and what was grown hold has been made new, and that all things are restored by him through whom they were made, even your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.