

# Luke 21:5-38 "Comfort in the Chaos"

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We're going to be reading a lengthy and challenging passage in Luke 21 this morning. But before we do, I want to give you some context that I think will help us to understand and appreciate what we're reading as we read this passage.

Jesus prophesies with remarkable accuracy in this passage the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem some 40 years after He's speaking here.

Some of you remember December 7th, 1941, a day that will live in infamy, the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Imagine how traumatic it would have been to be there on the island that day.

Many of you remember where you were on 9-11 because of how significant that event was. But imagine if you'd been there in New York City with two huge buildings crumbling.

[ 1 : 20 ] If you'd been right there, it might have felt like the end of the world, right? If you were in Indonesia in 2004 when the huge earthquake and tsunami destroyed cities and came sweeping over, it would have felt like the end of the world.

For Jews living in Jerusalem in the first century, that's what the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would have felt like. It would have felt like the end of the world.

The temple itself was stunning. Now, at this point, larger than a football field, covered in shining gold, clusters of grapes on the sides of it, golden grapes, the first century historian Josephus says, are the size of a man.

The temple is huge, but add on to that, the temple's spiritual significance. They're in God's holy city. Remember, mankind was created to live in God's presence, right? In this intimate relationship with Him from the very beginning. But sin separated us from God.

[ 2 : 38 ] Cast out of His presence until God takes up residence again among His people, first in the tabernacle, and then where?

In the temple in Jerusalem. This was the place where God meets with sinners. Sacrifices and offerings bringing unworthy sinners into the presence of the holy God.

That's what the temple means. And it's the temple itself that sets the Jews apart from the other nations. Yahweh dwells in their midst, right?

So when the Jews picture Jerusalem overrun and the temple destroyed, they are overwhelmed at the idea of being abandoned by God.

This is the end of the world. What hope do we have now? In Luke 21, Jesus stands in this very temple and He hears people praising its great glory and isn't it amazing?

[ 3 : 55 ] And He tells them some really bad news that gets their attention. Let's start reading in verse 5 of Luke 21. This is God's Word.

And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, Jesus said, 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.

Wow! No way! How is it even possible to imagine that? So they asked Him, Teacher, when will these things be?

And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place? 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. 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.

[ 5 : 03 ] Then He said to them, Nation will rise against nation, and 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.

But before all this, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you'll 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 how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You'll be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.

You'll 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. But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.

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, for these are days of vengeance to fulfill all that is written.

[ 6 : 14 ] 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. 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.

And sure enough, eventually Rome too, those Gentiles would fall, but in many ways, still Gentiles trampling in Jerusalem today.

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars and on the earth, distress of nations and perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.

He told them a parable. Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they come out and leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

[ 7 : 32 ] Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 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. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

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. And every day he was teaching in the temple.

But at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him. It starts in the temple.

It ends with the temple. It's about the temple. Let's pray and ask for God's help. Jesus, we thank you for your words that will not pass away.

[ 8 : 43 ] And we come to them this morning and want to hear your voice. So would you speak and teach us and change us we ask in your name. Amen.

I'm thankful even for this hard passage this morning because I think that Jesus is speaking to many of us right where we are today.

It's always true God's word speaks to us but I think especially so today there's a lot of chaos in our lives and in this world isn't there?

Many of us are overwhelmed. If you've wondered where God is in this world or in your life you're not alone in this room.

I've talked just this week with people struggling with depression because of the realities in their life and their ages span 80 years. It's not easy. Some of you have lost loved ones.

[ 9 : 52 ] You feel alone. Some of us are in the chaos of betrayal and feeling disoriented after the loss of our most trusted relationship in the world.

some of us are overwhelmed by the political upheaval the culture of death and division in our own country. Christians being rounded up and killed in other countries and where is God in this?

Some of our hearts are breaking every morning as we wake up and think of the destruction in our kids' lives and the pain that that brings us. Some of us just have so many moving pieces right now we can't keep our heads above water.

Bills due here and there and all the little things I just can't catch up on you throw in the flu for a few days and life has devolved into chaos.

For some of us it's at work where our faith doesn't seem to be helping. For others it's our families spinning out of control. For others it's just our sinful hearts where we feel consistently defeated.

[ 11 : 06 ] Everything seems to work against us. God doesn't seem to be coming through in this chaos. Who's for me? If I'm not talking about your life this week when I describe these things praise the Lord.

But you know these feelings you've experienced these feelings or you will. They will come in each of our lives. And you can also know this morning that many around you are feeling this way.

Many in this room. Dear Southwood family you're not alone in the chaos in feeling overwhelmed depressed confused tired tired.

And Jesus in this passage acknowledges the trials and sufferings and chaos of this life so honestly. He tells us what it's going to be like.

He starts talking to his immediate followers but he includes us too and I'm so thankful that he knows the bad stuff because it's really hard in the midst of chaos.

[ 12 : 27 ] Notice that Jesus has little time for pretend turn your frown upside down happy go lucky Christianity. He tells his disciples what it's going to be like.

All sorts of trials they'll face. Persecutions imprisonments betrayals even death natural disasters wars chaos everywhere.

There will be understandable cause for fear Jesus says. There will even be cause for heading for the hills fleeing the city to escape the slaughter in Jerusalem as many Christians apparently did by the way finding safety in the nearby town of Pella when the Romans overran Jerusalem.

Listen to Jesus. People will be against you. Nations will battle against each other and against God's people. Creation itself will spin out of control seemingly.

There's a lot of really bad news in this passage. That's mostly what it is. Just being honest. Jesus' forecast for the future circumstances of his followers is bleak at best.

[ 13 : 45 ] The world as they know it will be ending and God will be hard to find in the midst of it. But he offers hope too.

Comfort in the chaos that we need this morning. Not comfort in avoiding all of it. Not in circumstances actually being better than predicted.

But right there in the midst of your overwhelming life there's good news that you and I need to hear. As we look at that I want to show you briefly the controversy surrounding this passage. This is a bit academic which neither of us enjoys.

But hang with me. The reliability of God's word really matters. Okay? See in this passage Jesus talks through the first half at least through verse 24 about the destruction of the temple that happens in 70 A.D.

[ 14 : 50 ] That's a huge historical event. He appears then after that to move beyond that date with some apocalyptic language about the end times and his second coming in a cloud with power and glory.

And that's okay, right? Except then he also says in verse 32 that this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.

And at least the surface reading of that verse seems out of place doesn't it? Because Jesus didn't come back and consummate his kingdom in the first century, right? We're still here.

So how do we understand this passage? Well some have said it's easy, Jesus was just wrong. He was confused about how things would play out.

No! Don't take that view, not just because I think it's a bad idea. That's a terrible and simplistic reading of this passage where he so clearly predicts accurately so many future realities.

[ 15 : 59 ] That's lazy and easy. There's really good ways to understand what Jesus is telling us here that we need. There's a group, many people who think that Jesus doesn't actually talk at all here about his second coming.

This is a reasonable possibility that the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds in verse 27 is really a picture of a first century event. It's clearly referencing Daniel chapter 7 as we'll see in just a minute

where Jesus comes on the clouds but where does he come?

He comes to God himself, to the ancient of days. not coming on clouds to earth and so some say this all happens during the life of this generation of Jesus followers that he's speaking to.

There's some pretty compelling reasons to read it that way in which case if that's true all the comfort that's given here is specifically to Jesus followers right there but we can apply the principles from it to our lives.

Okay? That's one good option. But I do think in Luke that Jesus has been consistently pointing us beyond today to eternity hasn't he?

[ 17 : 21 ] In conversation after conversation more and more as we get to the end of his life on earth and so with the majority of scholars with many others I think the destruction of Jerusalem seeming like the end of the world is at least a picture of those last days.

There's strong language here indicating that and if that's the case then we just need to know how to understand verse 32. There's a lot of really good reasonable ways.

One that I like notices that this generation that phrase Jesus uses is a very common phrase in Luke and every single time it's used it's used to refer to this wicked generation.

Not so much to a group of people who live at the same time and place but a group of people whose hearts are opposed to the rule and reign of God.

It's more about an attitude of the heart than it is a particular time. Does that make sense? And so Jesus would be saying here that it's that wickedness, that opposition to God that will continue on earth until he has returned fully and finally in glory and dealt with chaos completely which does seem to be what he's saying here.

[ 18 : 42 ] That's the way I'm approaching the passage. I want you to know that but regardless of that or whether you think I'm crazy, Jesus' focus is not on when all of this will happen is it?

You know it's funny that is the direct question he's asked isn't it? They're scared about what's going to happen when Jesus so I can be ready and he never directly answers when all this will happen.

He says much about the historical events of the first century but people who use this passage merely to fill in their end times chart are missing the point. This is to be comfort for us secondarily or directly.

So let's get to the good stuff. Come back with us if I lost you for a couple minutes. There's good news and the good news is tucked in the midst of all the bad news which is actually going to make it even better good news.

Where's our comfort in all of this? If life is chaos and overwhelming and I'm out of control where's comfort? comfort, it's in Jesus himself.

[ 19 : 57 ] He's the one telling us what's coming and he says in verse 9 what? Do not fear. Even though all this fearful stuff will happen that I'm telling you about, do not fear.

How? What's the comfort? First, his presence is certain. Verse 15, you're on trial before kings, your life is on the line, but who is there?

I will give you a mouth and wisdom. I will, I will be there he says. He goes on to say that you will be hated and die, but not a hair on your head will perish.

What in the world, Jesus, if I die, what good is my hair? Y'all, it's the promise of his protection.

Sometimes immediate and physical, always ultimate and eternal.

That no one can snatch you out of my hand. It's for your good. I'm ultimately, no matter what you endure, you will live. I'm with you.

[ 21 : 17 ] And it's promises like that, that you can take to the bank. His promises are certain.

They're absolutely sure. Verse 33, heaven and earth will pass away.

Can you imagine? But my words will not pass away. Even if it is the end of the world, truly, it is not the end of God's promises.

The mountains may crash into the heart of the sea all around me, but God is my refuge and my strength.

His words never fail. Therefore, I will not fear. And maybe the most comforting of all, the one who is with you, whose promises you can trust is so powerful.

His power is unparalleled. Verse 27, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

[ 22 : 26 ] There is someone in control of all this chaos, in complete control of it. Jesus is describing this vision from Daniel chapter 7.

Behold, with the clouds of heaven came one like a Son of Man. There it is. And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people's nations and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away. And his kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed. There's one person in control.

Jesus says, listen, things may be spinning out of control for you, but they are firmly held in my powerful hand. All of them.

All the things. Forever. Your suffering is not random. Your struggle is not purposeless.

[ 23 : 33 ] hopeless. Your future is not hopeless. The comfort of this whole message that Jesus is giving to his followers is that he is in charge.

He's with them, protecting them, promising them hope they can count on, and controlling it all no matter what. It's kind of a long sermon, so I want to let you talk for a minute.

There's a beautiful statement of this comfort in the Heidelberg Catechism. I want you to say it with me this morning and remember that this is not merely theoretical mumbo jumbo.

This is practically, truly, your only comfort in life, in the chaos swirling all around you, and in death. So, say the answer with me. What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

[ 24 : 38 ] He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall for my head without the will of my Father in heaven.

In fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Amen. That's comfort in Jesus.

So, how do we live now? When the Bible tells us about end times, it's not usually for our speculation, but for our application in our lives today.

How do we live in light of this? This passage from beginning to end says comfort is found in one place. Jesus.

Jesus. Cling to him. That's how we live now. Clinging to him by not letting your focus get distracted by anyone else.

[ 25 : 50 ] Saying that they're the one you should hope in. That's verse 8. Don't run after them. Or by anything else in this world. Saying that it will medicate your pain and you'll be better.

That it will calm your chaos. That it will fulfill your heart. That's verse 34. Jesus is the one reigning in power and glory.

Always with you now for your good. And coming again for your redemption. So keep your focus on him. And confidently trust him.

Jesus says no matter what chaos you're living in. Fear not. You won't face anything that he can't care for you in.

Never. No one can snatch you out of his hand. So don't panic. Don't despair.

[ 27 : 01 ] Raise your heads he says. Raise your heads fearful ones. Struggling ones. Overwhelmed ones.

Raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near. Verse 28. Your redeemer is coming. Fix your eyes on the unseen the eternal. He's coming back for you. Finally what to do in light of all this?

To help you cling to the comforter. To tighten your heart's grip on him. Pray. Pray.

Pray. Verse 36. Stay awake at all times praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and stand before the Son of Man.

[ 28 : 01 ] It's not just spiritualizing hard times. Jesus is not telling you to pray because he's a Christian and you have to include that at the end of everything else. Make sure you pray too.

He's telling us to pray because there's no other way to make it through this life clinging to him. Pray. Y'all the logic is not hard.

Life is chaotic and overwhelming. There is only one person in control. So we have to cry out to him. You have to cling to him. You must train your heart moment by moment to trust in him. Pray. Not that your life will get better.

Not that the chaos will go away. Not that you'll come out looking good on the other side. Pray that you will stand before the Son of Man.

[ 29 : 02 ] That's what really matters. Fix your eyes on him. Trust him no matter what, no matter how dark things seem and pray, pray, pray.

That's clinging to the comforter. I want to give you an image of clinging to the comforter. In a movie that I've never seen called Twister, there's a great scene where two storm chasers, Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton, are out in a farm and there's this incredibly devastating tornado blowing through. I mean, that's why they're there, but this is more than they can handle. And here it comes. There is debris flying all around them, cows coming by through the air, fences flying, everything is out of control.

And they're looking desperately for safety. Their lives depend on finding one calm, firm place. And their last hope is an old well house that looks like it's about to go to.

They make it inside and there it is. There it is. One metal bar bolted to the ground and they strap themselves to it as tightly as they can and then they cling to it and hang on, as he says, while the storm blows everything else away.

[ 30 : 42 ] Listen, life is blowing everything around you or it will one day. And there will be a metal bar firmly bolted to the ground.

And I can already tell you who it is. You can already tell me who it is. It's Jesus. Hymn writers have been telling us this for centuries because they've lived through it.

When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul.

Fear not, I am with thee. O be not dismayed, for I am thy God and will still give thee aid. I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

[ 31 : 54 ] When all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay. Cling to him.

Don't let go. And now I got better news for you. He's already holding on to you and he won't let go.

I've told you all in the last few weeks that I've been living in one of those overwhelming chaotic seasons of life myself. I'll tell you what has been helping me cling to Jesus because I've needed it. I've been over and over back to the vision given to John in Revelation chapter 1. I want you to look at this. I've been dying to share this with you all and finally the passage lets me talk about it.

In the midst of the lamp stands one like a son of man. There he is like a son of man, right? Talking about the same guy. Clothed with a long robe, with a golden sash around his chest, the hairs of his head were white like white wool like snow.

[ 33 : 04 ] His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

I won't go into all the details, but it means he's really wise, and his promises are really true, and he's really powerful, and it is meant to be an overwhelming picture, so much so that this is what happens to the guy who sees it.

Verse 17, when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead, but he laid his right hand on me, saying, fear not, there it is again, I am the first and the last and the living one, I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades.

Do you hear him? He's got his hand on your shoulder, and he says, I know what you're going through, I've been through worse, I died, and I'm alive, and now I have the keys over the things that are driving you crazy, over death itself, over Satan himself, I control them, trust me, I've got you, and then the best part, last thing, verse 20, as for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, wow, isn't that amazing, seven stars, but look what they are, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, representing all the churches, the seven lampstands are the seven churches, he's walking around in the midst of his people, he's there with you, and he holds you in his hand, he holds us in his hand, powerful, kind, unwavering hand, he's holding you, he's not letting go, ever, the destruction of the temple was going to leave God's people feeling that he had abandoned them, how could they ever get back that relationship they were made for, and Jesus stands in this very temple, and says, when it's gone,

God has not abandoned you, God still meets with sinners, something greater than the temple is here, as he says elsewhere, if I had to put 34 verses into one sentence, and you wish I did it earlier, it's this, cling to Jesus, because no matter what happens, he is the place God still meets with sinners, and still clings to sinners, he is, see him, offering himself to fearful followers in the Jerusalem temple, that's what he's doing here, see him being a firm foundation that is holding on to persecuted Christians in Revelation chapter one, see him meeting with sinners, men and women,

boys and girls in Huntsville,

[ 36 : 48 ] Alabama, through his body and blood given for you, that's what he says is happening here, the Lord Jesus on the night that he was betrayed took bread, bread, he broke it, and he gave it to his followers as I'm ministering in his name, give this bread to you, and he said take, eat, this is my body, do this in remembrance of me, I want to be there with you, and in the same way he took the cup and said this cup's not like any other, it's the new covenant in my blood, shed for many for the remission, the forgiveness of sins, drink from it, and I'm there with you, for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim his death until he comes again and he's coming, that's why he gives this to us, that we will cling to him afresh again today, that's why we need to do this so often, that we'll be strengthened to cling to him as he clings to us, if you see him here at this table, and you trust him in the midst of everything in your life, come and be strengthened knowing he holds you and you can hold on to him, if you don't trust him, if he's not the place where you've cast yourself in the midst of difficulties of life, don't come and eat at this table, but we'd still invite you to come and talk with us, if you come forward you can ask us, we'll pray with you, we love that, or we'll talk with you after the service, we're thrilled that you're here, and there's nothing we would want you to know more than the only place of refuge and safety in this world that any of us has found that holds, and it's

Jesus, and he's here to meet with you, God meets with sinners now, not in the temple, in Jesus, let's pray and we'll do that together, Jesus, thank you that we can know our father again because of what you've done, thank you that you are with us, no matter what, and as we eat this bread and drink this juice, would you use very common elements for a very, very sacred purpose, that we would be strengthened in our hearts to see you clearly, and to hold on to you more desperately and firmly than when we came in.

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