

Jesus or the Temple - Whose End is Nigh?

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[0 : 00] Let's pray again together. Lord our God, what hope and joy, what comfort it brings to sing of how stable and how sure you are, that regardless of whatever else is going on in the world, even if mountains were falling into the sea, even if the earth itself was destroyed, you would still be true, you would still be God, you would still be there.

And for that Lord we give you thanks. We thank you that all the different situations we bring together this morning, some of us coming with great joy and gladness, some of us coming morning, some of us coming with worry, some of us feeling like the world is incredibly unstable around us.

Lord we thank you that bringing all these different situations and lives and backgrounds, we nonetheless come to the same God who calls us to be still and to know that you are God.

Father we pray that in our worship this morning, in our singing, in our reading of your words, in our praying to you now and in our listening to your word being preached, we pray that you would give us all a sense of peace before you, that you would draw us to yourself in a way that challenges us, in a way that tells us that we all need to be profoundly changed and yet also an encounter with you that gives us peace and that shows us grace.

Father we pray that as we worship you this morning and particularly as we look to understand your word, we pray for your spirit to be with us.

[1 : 59] We are so glad before you and so thankful for everything that your Son Jesus has accomplished in His coming and living among us, in His preaching the gospel to us and also in His life of perfect obedience to your law and also in His death in our place on the cross.

We thank you for everything that He has accomplished and for how He has been resurrected and how He has now ascended to your right hand in glory.

But we also are thankful for your Holy Spirit having been given to us to apply everything that He has accomplished and we ask for your spirit to be with us this morning in a powerful way for Him to speak to us through your word, for Him to help us to understand who you are and also to see in light of that who and what we are as people who are not fundamentally good and as people who need to find forgiveness and grace from you.

So Lord through your spirit help us to see what your Son has done. We also pray especially this morning for Calum and Liz in India and we pray for you to encourage them.

Lord they have got to deal with some really difficult issues in the church out there. We pray for you to fill them with wisdom and with your spirit and we pray also for your protection upon them in every sense and in particular we pray for Calum and his health.

[3 : 33] And we ask that it would not be malaria that He has although He has been treated for it as a precaution and we pray for you to give Him good health for the remainder of their time out there.

We also thank you that they have Ian McCaskill with them now out working with them and we pray that He would be a source of encouragement and strength to them as well as they share the work.

Lord we thank you for having young Romali with us for the first time and also we praise you for her safe arrival and we pray for your hand of blessing to be upon her throughout the whole of her life that she would be someone who finds great joy and glory in you and the Lord.

And we pray for David and Monica as they raise her that you will help them and equip them with all of the challenges that come with parenting and raising a child. So we thank you for them.

Lord we also pray for you to bless Derek as he is away preaching in cultarity this weekend and we, everything that we pray for ourselves about asking you to bless us and help us to hear your word.

[4 : 46] We pray for him and for the people that he is sharing your word with there. So Lord we pray for you to use him in a powerful and in a real way.

Father we ask for all of these things in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen. In a moment we are going to have a look at Luke chapter 21 but before that we are going to sing again to the glory of God in Psalm 50.

Psalm 50 and we are singing from the beginning down to verse 7. The Lord the mighty one is God alone. He speaks and summons all the earth abroad from rising of the sun to where it sets. From Zion's perfect beauty shines our God. We are going to stand and sing. Our tune is Ellers. Stand and sing together.

The Lord the mighty one is God alone.

[5 : 57] He speaks and summons all the earth abroad from rising of the sun to where it sets.

From Zion's perfect beauty shines our God.

Our God will come. Be silent. He will come.

Before him far will burn and tempest-rate.

He summons all the earth and heaven above that he may touch his full kiss heritage.

[7 : 20] Now bring to me my consecrated bonds.

No superb sacrifice are blessed to be.

The heavens will proclaim his righteousness.

For God himself is judge and non-batee.

Here, O my people, listen while I speak.

[8 : 19] Against you is now our will to survive.

You are my people, I am God your God.

Hear me as I address you from on up.

This morning we are in Luke chapter 21, which we read moments ago. Please keep your Bible open on pages 1056 and 1057.

We are really focusing on verse 5 down to the end of the chapter. A few months ago, as I am sure the vast majority of you will have seen of you, read newspapers or ever listen to the news, the comedians Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross were the subject of national attention when live on a BBC radio program they made an obscene phone call to Andrew Sachs, a veteran actor.

[9 : 47] Their shocking immature behaviour was the number one story all across the news, newspapers, radio news, television, internet, everything.

This was the big story for a week that lasted for days. At the same time as that was happening here, and that was all that we could focus on, war was breaking out in West Africa and huge numbers of people in the Congo were being killed.

This made the news, but it wasn't anything like headline news. As a nation we weren't really bothered by the human suffering, by the death, by the war that was breaking out in the Congo, but we just could not get past the fact that Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand made this obscene prank to the guy who used to be Manuel in Faulty Towers.

At the same time as this was all happening, I saw a piece of satire in a newspaper, a satirical cartoon highlighting our preoccupation with the bland, with the banal, with the less important when something far more significant is happening.

The cartoon depicted the front page of a newspaper, a tabloid, and it had pictures of Brand and Ross with the huge headline, Brand and Ross Make Obscene Phone Call, and this was the entirety of the front page of the newspaper.

[11 : 14] But in the top right hand corner there was a tiny box that said, World War 3 breaks out, Millions Dead, page 47. Meaning that for us there would be 46 pages of irrelevance that we would find so much more important than World War 3 breaking out.

And if you're from the Congo at that time, war was breaking out. Faced with the seriously important and the comparatively trivial we humans generally, and particularly in our society, entertainment saturated, superficially obsessed, adverse to serious reflection, we generally pick the trivial. We consistently major on the minors. The cultural context here in Luke 21, in Jesus' situation, is different.

But human nature is still the same. We find people confronted with not just something, but someone who's not just seriously important, but who is of the ultimate importance, Jesus Christ, and yet the people who are confronted with Him nonetheless focus first of all on something of far lesser importance, the aesthetic beauty of the temple that they're in.

To set the context here, in the last couple of chapters Jesus has been speaking, and speaking with actions as well as words, about the temple being in need of cleansing, speaking about Him being the one who would cleanse it, and Him being the one who would replace it with Himself.

[12:50] He was speaking about how He Himself was more important than the temple, and the religious, legal and social powers want Him killed for this. And that's why we're moving now to the passion narrative of Jesus Christ.

And He's just acknowledged that He's going to die soon. But He has said that this death will not be the end of Him. He needs to be rejected first of all in order to then become the chief cornerstone. He needs to lose in order to win. In a world where Jerusalem is the center, and where the temple is at the center of Jerusalem, Jesus is making this huge claim that He is more central still, and that we need to center on Him more than anything else.

And now He's in the temple, and He's explaining this to people, and He finds people that still don't get it. They're there admiring the temple, saying, isn't its architecture amazing?

Isn't it aesthetically beautiful? Isn't it full of offerings to God? And He's standing there, having explained all of this to them, and standing there before them as God in the flesh.

[14:00] And yet these people are still majoring on the minors. And notice that these aren't just random people. Luke says they are some of His disciples who still aren't getting the true importance of Jesus.

So at this point Jesus rocks their world by telling them that the temple, the thing that they're still struggling to see past, is going to be completely destroyed.

Verse 6, As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another. Every one of them will be thrown down.

This is obviously an alarming scenario, because the temple isn't just going to fall down, it's going to be completely destroyed. It's stones will be thrown down. This is violence.

This is Him speaking about an invading force coming right into the center of their world to Jerusalem, and then going to the most important place to the temple, and devastating it.

[15:00] He has really pulled the rug out from underneath their feet. These rocked the foundations of their world and alarmed them. And in response to this, the disciples ask a question.

And Jesus gives an answer. The question is primarily about the temple, about their kind of security in this world. The answer is primarily about Jesus.

Look at the question. Okay? Teacher, in verse 7, When will these things happen, and what will be the sign that they're about to take place? The question is, how will we know that this is going to happen to the temple?

How will we know that what we cling to in this world is going to be taken from us? Look at the answer. Many people will come who claim to be me, who claim to be Jesus.

Don't follow any of them. In verse 8, He replied, Watch out that you are not deceived, for many will come in my name claiming I am He, and the time is near.

[16:01] Do not follow them. Okay so there's, you kind of see this, and you think, is there some kind of discrepancy here? Has He misheard them? Because the question is about one thing, and the answer seems to be about another.

Why one faced with a question on the temple, does Jesus give an answer about himself? Jesus is still trying to get home to them who He is.

He wants them to realize His importance. He begins talking about himself because He matters more than the temple. In His own mind He takes primacy.

The important issue really isn't what happens to the temple. The important issue is who Jesus is, and do you know Him? Getting that right is the most important issue.

Remember, Jesus has just told them something that has alarmed them and frightened them.

Imagine if someone came to you and said, you know that whatever the most important building is to you, for most of you, your homes, the block of flat you live in, someone came and said to you, there's going to be a time that comes when every stone that's here is going to be thrown down.

[17:07] That's really alarming, and that's a big issue. That is important. But Jesus is saying He matters even more. If temple is going to be left or ruined, and Jesus explains it in terms of wars and revolutions, this is how it's going to be thrown down.

When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.

For Jesus' disciples, the thought of the temple being thrown down and destroyed is just too much. It's the end of the world as they know it.

Jesus tells them not to think like that, not to think that when the temple is destroyed, that's it. He tells them this is going to happen. The beginning of the end as you know it, and Jerusalem is going to be left or ruined, but that's not the end in its entirety.

It won't all happen at once. In fact, it's just the beginning of the end, the beginning of the end of everything else in the world. Look at what Jesus says here. There's a little sentence that he gives that is so important to understand the rest of what's coming.

[18:20] The end will not come at once. There's far more that needs to be fixed and cleansed and completely transformed than just this building in the middle of Jerusalem.

To put it in computer terms, some of you will know exactly what I'm talking about, some of you maybe not. Well, sometimes if you have a computer, if you have a PC, you get a program on it, an individual program that gets messed up.

It crashes every time you try and use it. It doesn't do what you want it to do. It doesn't work properly. It's ruined. So you have to then uninstall that program, the individual program, and reinstall it afterwards.

Put it back in its original form, and then hopefully it will all work properly. That's just with one program. But sometimes the problems are deeper and wider, and it's not just one program that's faulty.

Sometimes everything on your PC is running slowly. Everything is crashing. Nothing is working as it should. Those of you who are Mac users will be listening smugly thinking, I use a Mac, not a PC.

[19:31] It never crashes. But the PC users out there, you'll get this. Every program is always crashing when things take forever to load up, when the whole system has really deep, fundamental problems.

Nothing is running as it should. Then you need to do far more than just pick one program and reinstall it. You need to reboot the entire system.

Everything needs restarted. And that's what Jesus is about to describe with not just the end of a local program in the temple in Jerusalem, but he's about to branch out to speak about the end of the world in its entirety.

Everything, the whole world, not just this temple building is full of sin. And everything, everywhere, needs to be recreated, rebooted.

They need to be remade. And that's what Jesus tells them when he goes on to speak about, if you want to keep up the computer analogy, reinstalling this central program, the temple.

[20:38] That not just kind of deleting temple.exe and then putting in the same program, but actually upgrading it so temple gets replaced by Jesus.

Not just speaking about that, about this local thing, although he does speak about the end of the temple, but he speaks about the renewal of everything in the universe, everything being made new. Now, this passage is a hard one to understand, okay? But we're going to try and make it clear today. But to keep it clear, you have to keep in mind those two things that we've just been speaking about, that Jesus is talking about the end of the temple, okay?

Like a small scale rebooting and then being replaced by Jesus himself. And secondly, the end of everything, this large scale kind of system-wide rebooting.

So we have to keep those two things in mind to really understand what he's speaking about. Jesus, he actually starts off speaking on the grand scale, speaking about the end of all things, verses 10 and 11.

[21:40] Then he said to them, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

So he's speaking about everything being renewed, the whole system. But then he says at the start of verse 12, but before all this, before all this, before everything is renewed everywhere on the grand scale, he speaks about the end of the temple, the destruction that happens at a local level. The end of the temple. So we've really got two points in our sermon, the end of the temple and the end of everything. The end of the temple, we're looking at verses 10 to 24 in their immediate context.

Jerusalem is going to be destroyed and the church in Jerusalem is going to be persecuted. And this actually took place in AD 70 afterwards. The Romans came along, they sacked Jerusalem, left out a ruin, they destroyed the temple and everything that Jesus said would happen happened.

Verses 12, well in verse 12 though he says, but before all this, they'll lay hands on you and they'll persecute you. They'll deliver you to synagogues and prisons. They'll be brought before kings and governors, all on account of my name.

[22 : 55] He sent them that in the time between now and everything locally being ended, you're going to be arrested. You're going to be taken before the authorities and imprisoned because of your faith in me.

But then in the next verse, in verse 13, he speaks about why this happens. This will result in your being witnesses to them. Jesus is actually saying to them, look, follow my example, be willing to lose in order to win.

They'll arrest you and they'll treat you terribly. The result being that you'll be persecuted and everything that goes with that and it's horrible.

But the goal of it, the victory that's hidden in the guise of this defeat is that you will be witnesses to them. You'll share the gospel with them. And we actually see this coming true in acts where Christians are arrested and they're imprisoned and they use those opportunities to share the gospel, to share Jesus with them and often those around them end up becoming Christians.

So he gives them encouragement in the verses that come after 14 to 19 saying that you're going to be persecuted but he gives them encouragement to endure even though everyone including your families, he says, well, hate you for me.

[24 : 16] Not a hair of your head will perish. And you read this and you think, whoa, this is really heavy. This is awful. Is everyone else having a great time while the Christians suffer?

But that's not actually the case because what comes next, I won't read the verses for the sake of time, but verses 20 down to 24, he paints this bleak picture where in fact the whole society is crumbling in their local context and everyone is suffering and the church is suffering particularly in the middle of it, but it's all at a local level.

It's about Jerusalem being destroyed and how awful that will be for everyone there. The point is that everything in Jesus on immediate context, society, religion and so on, everything is ruined and crumbling to the point of needing a complete restart.

Jesus is going to replace the temple. The temple is not going to last forever. And he says that once Jerusalem is destroyed, once this locally everything comes to an end, he says we move into the times of the Gentiles which then go on and have to be fulfilled to the end.

So we've been looking firstly at the end of the temple in Jerusalem and chronologically at this point, his prophecy is moving forward from here on.

[25 : 42] Once the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, then he moves back to where he actually begun, which is the end of everything, the complete rebooting of the system. So we're in our second point, the end of all things.

And we're looking at verses 25 down to 36. There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.

Jesus is speaking about something different here to what he was just addressing. Before everything was in local terms, Jerusalem, Judea, the temple building. Now he uses cosmic language.

It's not just one building or one city. It's the sun and the moon and the stars. It's the earth, it's nations. It's the sea. Everything is on a much bigger scale.

This is universe wide. This is the whole earth, all of its nations. So Jesus is building up this idea that he has come to cleanse and restore and renew not just the temple or Jerusalem or one nation in Israel.

[26 : 48] He is here to affect everything. Again, go back to our computing analogy. He's saying that the whole system, all the software, all the hardware, everything needs to go.

It all has to be recreated into something new, something better. And faced with this, with the end of everything, it produces two responses in people.

It produces terror and it produces, or it produces, humble eagerness. The end of all things produces either terror or humble eagerness.

Firstly terror, verses 26 and 27. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Faced with everything being ended, everything being changed and transformed, people are fainting with fear at what's happening.

[27 : 57] The Son of Man, that's a reference to Jesus, is coming back with power and great glory. Great glory is literally abundant importance.

He's coming back as the most important person that exists, the most important thing. He's coming back to judge all that has not regarded him as the most important.

And those who have firmly rejected him, be they very religious or very irreligious, start fainting with terror because of what's coming. So there's that response that's produced, but there's also another response, which is humble eagerness.

Verse 28, when these things begin to take place, and this is directed towards these disciples, towards Christians, stand up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near. I've called this response humble eagerness deliberately. When Jesus returns to end and to recreate all things, to judge how we have regarded him as having abundant importance, great glory or not, non-Christians feel a sense of terror.

[29 : 12] But look at the Christians. They feel it as well. That's their first response. There's an implication here in the command to get up, lift up your head.

There's an implication that they too have felt the weight of Jesus' return. They fainted. Their heads went down. These aren't people who think that they're morally superior to anyone else.

They're not people who see Jesus coming back on a cloud in his glory and think, man, I have deserved this moment. Haven't I been a good person? Haven't I lived an excellent life?

You don't find that. What you find with Christians is people who know what they deserve, and it's not to stand up boldly when Jesus comes.

But nonetheless, they're told because of grace, because that's what they trust in, rather than their own good works in this life, rather than being good people. They're told because of grace to stand up and lift up their heads, because what's coming to them is different.

[30 : 16] What's coming to them is redemption, rather than judgment. There's a huge practical application of this, which we're going to close with in terms of the different responses this provokes in your life in terms of what happens, but also in terms of life right now, don't spend your life as an escapist.

Don't be an escapist in how you live your life. We as human beings have got this inbuilt sense of God, of the divine that He exists.

It's like it's etched into our DNA that God is real. His reality is written on our hearts, and we can't escape that. You can no more change that than you can change your DNA.

It's engraved in us that God exists. We can't escape it, but we can try really hard to dull that reality, because if we don't know God as a Savior, if we only know Him as an enemy and as a judge, it gnaws away at us the reality that this life does come to an end and that we have to face up to our maker.

And if we don't deal with that through the Gospel, we so often try and deal with it by escapism. We start living for the weekend, where the best bits of life are the ones where you have no idea who you are, where you are, what you are doing, where you wake up the next day having had no idea what happened the night before.

[32 : 01] Escapism. If you know the Gospel, if you're a Christian, you don't need to live an escapist life. And Jesus picks up here on drunken escapism, where rather than face up to the realities of life, of death, of judgment, people just drink away, dull their senses.

When you know that one day you'll have to meet your maker, and you'll meet Him as a redeemer rather than judge, where Jesus tells you, stand up, lift up your head, this is your redemption when you come before your maker.

It makes this life. It doesn't actually dull this life. It makes it more livable. It makes it more enjoyable, much more so. If you're a Christian, you don't need to live your life just trying to escape and forget. Jesus speaks about coming to bring life and life in all its fullness. We're going to stop at that point. We've been speaking about the end of all things, but this is really a transforming truth if you believe the Gospel, if you grab hold of it.

And what will happen to you at the end actually is the reason that you live differently in the present and the here and now, because we know that what we're going to meet is redemption.

[33 : 21] We live differently. We don't feel the need to escape from the moment, but rather we love the moment. Let's stop and respond to God in prayer, and then we're going to sing another Psalm.

Let's pray. Lord God, it naturally fills us with a sense of terror, a sense of fainting and falling down before you to think of your judgment, to think of you coming to assess us and our lives because we know that you're perfect and that we're not.

It's so natural for us to just want to escape and to live lives in escapism. This helps us through the Gospel to be set free, to live in a different way, to know that by grace what we find with you is redemption, what we find is a call to stand up and lift up our heads because you have accepted us because of Jesus rather than because of ourselves.

And help us because of that to be people who cherish life, who every day find life eminently more worth living than we found it before we knew you, before there was this temptation just to switch off and be disconnected.

So Lord, please help us. Help us where we struggle to believe this, where we struggle to think ahead to something like the end of time when so many of us, especially those of us who are young, have no thought of the future because that's the culture we live in.

[34 : 58] So help us to think in a way that's shaped by your word and help us above all to look to Jesus and in Him to find a Savior and find salvation.

So we pray for this in His name. Amen. We're going to close our service singing again in Psalm 46a.

We've sung from this Psalm already and we're going to sing the rest of the Psalm from verse 8 down to the end. Come, see the works the Lord has done, the judgments He commands, the desolations He has brought to pass in many lands.

In every land throughout the earth He makes all conflict cease. He shatters bow and spear and shield and brings His reign of peace. So this is a Psalm that's speaking about that time when God restores, when God reloads, reboots and upgrades the whole system.

So we're going to sing to God's praise, the tune, the sync killed out, the standard integral by■■■d's own voice of God sing together.

[36 : 19] Come, See the works the Lord has done, the judgments He commands, the desolations He has wrote to pass in many lands.

In every land through our clear earth, He makes all conflicts cease.

He shatters cold and spear and shield, And brings His reign of peace.

He still and over that I am Lord, On Earth exalted I, And all the nations of the world, My name will glorify.

The Lord Almighty is with us To strengthen and sustain.

[38 : 12] For Jacob's cause, Our strong defense, And fortress will remain.

Now may grace, mercy, peace and love from the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with each of us now and into all eternity. Together, God's people sing. Amen.