

Text: Luke 21:5-28

Purpose: that the hearers more fully believe Jesus' words (even the hard ones)

There are lots of layers of veneer in this text. Jesus predicts natural disasters. He warns the 12 that they will be put on trial. Wars will saturate the world. Pregnant women will be hung out to dry when the future destruction arrives. Like I said, there are lots of layers of veneer.

But what's underneath all that veneer? Jesus predicts the destruction of the great Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. “[T]he days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” Jesus makes a claim, what we might call a prophecy. That's the table underneath all those layers of veneer. The Temple will be destroyed. The question is, was He right?

We typically argue that Jesus was about 33 years old when He died and rose from the dead. So those major life events happened in 33 AD.

Jump ahead 40 years to 70 AD. It's Jerusalem. A city with multiple walls, a massive Temple, and thousands of torqued off Jews who were tired of a century long Roman occupation. Plus, there were over 20,000 Roman soldiers that surrounded Jerusalem. The Romans were equally torqued off.

A Jewish historian named Josephus depicted the horror that engulfed the city. The Jewish militia was surrounded by Romans. When they tried to leave the city walls to forage for food, the Romans arrested them and crucified them in plain view of the city. The Romans sent a clear message. Josephus reported that hundreds of crosses lined Jerusalem.

Inside the city walls, famine broke out. Jewish pilgrims had entered the city for the Passover Feast; so it was extra packed. But with no food coming in or out, thousands starved. It got so bad that one mother roasted her infant son, ate half of him, and offered the rest to the Jewish marauders stealing food from the helpless.

Finally, the Roman Emperor Titus broke into where the Temple was located. Tired and angry, the Roman soldiers disobeyed the Emperor's command, and the soldiers burned down the Temple and plundered all of its gold.

Josephus estimated that 1,000,000 died in the siege of Jerusalem. Most of those were innocent women, children, and the elderly.

Jesus predicted 40 years earlier: “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,...”

Underneath all the layers of Luke 21, there’s something pretty plain: Jesus was right. Jesus called it. The Romans vindicated Jesus’ claim about the Temple going up in smoke.

So if Jesus was right about the Temple, doesn’t that mean that the rest of what He had to say which is reported in the Gospels and Epistles is right too?

Our modern problem is to listen to Jesus only when it’s convenient or what He has to say jives with our modern sensibilities. It’s all too easy to stop listening when Jesus challenges us.

Jesus challenged the woman at the well who had 5 husbands and a live-in boyfriend. He called for Mosaic spousal fidelity – one man, one wife. Fidelity leading up to marriage as well as during marriage.

Sex, we convince ourselves, is meaningless. Where Jesus puts great emphasis on how it is meant to unite two people, and Paul says that sex makes 2 people 1, we stop listening to Jesus. Sex is just something you do; it relieves stress, kinda like popping an aspirin.

In a Boston University newspaper interview, an expert was asked why students prefer hooking up rather than committed relationships. She responded: “we’re living in a culture that promotes instant gratification and tells us that if we don’t like what we’ve got, we can always upgrade.” **If you don’t like what you’ve got, you can always upgrade?** The problem there is the thing you don’t like is a *human being*. You can kick the tires on a used car before you buy it, but what happens to us as a society – to our daughters and sons – when they’re being exploited like a used car? Is it any wonder that our kids are suffering from depression, anxiety, and self-harm?

If Jesus was right about the Temple's destruction, isn't it possible that He's right about our sexual ethics too?

If Jesus was right about the Temple coming down, isn't it possible that He's right about money and our relationship to it? The one thing Jesus talks the most about is money.

He said things like: "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

I think our modern sense is to think, "Yeah, some people get caught up by money, but I wouldn't. I'm grounded. I wouldn't lose touch with reality if I were rich."

That's what drove us to buy up powerball tickets. "If I won, I'd give it to X, Y, and Z." We envision ourselves becoming philanthropic superheroes had we won the \$2 billion prize. But Jesus warns otherwise. It wouldn't move you to be a deeper person, it would move you to be a person more deeply dependent on yourself.

Queen Mary University in London conducted a study to see who would be more generous: poor people or rich people. The study found that people with fewer resources were more likely to give more proportionally speaking than those with higher resources. In other words, it's been found in multiple studies that the richer you are the less likely you are to give.

Jesus is pretty plain; money is an addiction that will kill you. But we're not really inclined to listen to Him are we? It's not so much an addiction as it is a cure to our problems. We'd be so much more happy and charitable if we had it.

Look, we could make a long list of things Jesus calls good for us that we're straight up ignoring:

1. Withholding forgiveness
2. Dwelling in anxiety
3. Same-sex relationships in our society
4. Honoring those in authority over us

5. Embracing hatred even though Jesus calls it murder
6. Embracing Sabbath rest once a week

There's a great deal that Jesus calls us to that we're ignoring or calling Jesus an ignorant, patriarchal, insane, buzzkill, lying preacher.

But I'm still left wondering. If Jesus was right about the Temple's downfall, isn't it possible that He's right about the hard stuff too? The stuff that makes us chafe.

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I took a trip with fellow seminarians to New York City for two weeks as a class to understand what it's like to lead churches in a major city. We had a day off to roam around the city and do whatever we wanted. One of my friends said that we should go see a Broadway play. When were we going to have the chance to do that again? Most of us chafed though because it was kind of expensive. My friend was so convinced that we needed to go that he paid for our tickets.

We got inside and we were all blown away by the play. The singing. Just how the backstage crew made a pretty small stage feel massive! It was like nothing I'd seen before.

When we left the theater I had to admit it, my friend was right. I didn't know what I was missing until I sat down in the theater. It was a good experience for me.

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We chafe at Jesus and the hard stuff He has for us because we lose sight of something really important: HE IS GOOD FOR US. Yes, He's right. He was right about the Temple. He's probably right about the stuff we're ignoring from God.

I knew going to a Broadway play would be a great opportunity, but until I experienced the kindness of my friend buying the tickets and then hearing and seeing the play – I wasn't moved to enter the theater.

We need to experience the rightness of Christ along with His kindness – along with His good intentions for us.

Near the end of our reading today, Jesus predicts the return of the “Son of Man” - Himself. But why is He returning? Verse 28: He's returning for your “redemption.”

It's His intention to redeem you, buy you back from the stuff that's killing you. He intends to bring you out of a violent world – a violent world that killed hundreds of thousands in Jerusalem. Buy you back from exploitative, toxic relationships; He was stripped naked and exploited so you wouldn't have to be. Buy you back from the greed or the fear of not having enough money that suffocates your heart; He made Himself penniless on this earth, so that you could have the riches of heaven. He has your best interest in mind – He's going to come back for you. But if that's not good enough for you, pay attention to the cross. If Jesus was crazy then you can ignore the cross; He got Himself killed for no reason. But if He's right, then Him being crucified is EXACTLY what the world needs – exactly what you need.

Jesus was right about the Temple; I think it's safe to say He's right about the hard stuff we don't want to hear too. But we don't listen to Him just because He's right. We listen to Him, we follow Him, because He wants us to thrive in His Father's world. But you can only thrive so long as you pay attention to the one who first created the contours of thriving. Amen.