

Stay Awake at All Times

Luke 21:5-38

This morning we are in Luke 21 and we are once again going to examine Jesus' words on the end times. Do you know what the beauty of studying the end-times is? It is that there is an end. Brothers and sisters in Christ, one day Jesus will return and there will be an end to all of the brokenness in the world. He will make all things new. He will not simply repair the brokenness but it will be new. He doesn't put duct tape, bailing wire, and super glue on things. He gives us new bodies, new hearts, new minds, new, new, new.

The study of the "end-times" and "Christ's second come" is called, *eschatology*. I need to make sure you know what that word is. I am sure if I took a poll of all of the positions on eschatology in this room we would be all over the map. Some of us would be *premillennial dispensationalist*, some would be *historical premillennialist*, some but not many would be *post millennialist*, some would be *amillennialist* and would say, "what's a millennialist?" No matter what your eschatological position is we are all *pan-millennialist*. In other words, it is all going to pan out in the end.

The fact is, whatever your eschatology is, it does not determine your salvation. We can all disagree on the ends-times and it will not affect your eternal destiny. However, I will say some eschatological systems serve the gospel better than others. Some eschatological positions show the urgency of evangelism and missions while others weaken the call to repent and believe. Some positions flow out of the gospel while others are pressed on the gospel and actually undermine the person and work of Jesus. So, while your eschatology does not determine your salvation, your understanding of the end-times will strengthen work of the gospel or weaken it.

The passage we are going to study this morning is called the Olivet Discourse. It is often considered to be a very controversial and complicated text by some scholars. Usually when people study it they pull in many other prophetic texts and build out their charts and signs in order to make their points. Actually, when you are consistent with your principles of interpreting Scripture it is not that complicated or confusing at all.

Bottom line: Jesus' aim in this text is to give pastoral counsel for the end-times. He begins this prophetic eschatology passage with pastoral counsel. Then He weaves it through the whole passage and concludes with how-to live-in times of trial, tribulation, and suffering. Jesus' pastoral counsel was for His people to *hold fast to the word* of God as they go through their trials, tribulations, and suffering. What people often focus on is Jesus prophecy of the end-times instead of His pastoral counsel for the end-times.

One of the things that makes vv. 5-38 a little complicated and confusing is its language. These verses are narrative that contains apocalyptic language, pastoral commands/counsels, and prophecies. So, while Jesus' language moves easily from one to the other it can become somewhat complicated for us to understand. Yet, we must understand it.

However, the key is understanding this passage is understanding the questions the disciples asked. We had a taste of this in Luke 17 when the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. Now Jesus' disciples ask a similar question because of His comments about the temple's destruction.

To answer the questions, we hear Luke's version of what is called the *Olivet Discourse*. This is the setting for where Jesus was when He answered the questions. It is called the *Olivet Discourse* because they were actually on the Mount of Olives when He answered the questions. Luke's Gospel does not say that but when we read about the *Olivet Discourse* in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 we see that Jesus spoke of the destruction of the temple when they walked out of the temple but when they got to the Mount of Olives that evening He explained it all.

Jesus main point is to give pastoral counsel for the end-times. *There are two main points to my sermon and I will give them to you as we work through the text.*

I. Jesus pastoral counsel for the end times: Hold fast as the end times begins (Luke 21:5-24)

As I studied this passage I thought of the old story called *The Dash*. Perhaps you have heard it. It is somewhat corny but it has a good point. It goes something like this: A father and son walk into the cemetery where the father's dad had just been buried. The father was remembering the wonderful life his dad had lived. His young son was asking him questions about him. The son looked at the tombstone and asked what the dates meant. The father said well, this date in 1940 was when my dad, your grandfather, was born and this last date, dated just a couple of days ago, was when he died. The young boy marveled at the dates. Then the father said, "Son do you know what the most important thing about this date is?" The son said, "Well I guess it was when he was born or when he died." The father said, "No, son, it is the dash in between the dates for this represents the life your grandfather lived." Then the father asked the son, "What will you do with your dash?"

Let me show you what I mean. Jesus didn't give dates for the beginning of the end-times or when He would return. Instead, He gave signs that were like dates. However, His main point is not when things begin and end but what you do with the dash. Jesus is giving pastoral counsel for the already and the not yet. It is how we live in the time in-between for which He is concerned and for which his pastoral counsel is aimed.

Let's walk through the text. On the heels of Jesus warning to the people about the scribes and Pharisees, He walked out of the temple and His disciples apparently wanted to lift His spirits so they commented on the beauty and wonder of the temple. The temple was an engineering and architectural marvel of that day. The foundation stones of the temple were the size of box cars on a train and they were made of solid white marble. They were crusted with jewels and overlaid with gold. The doors were cedar overlaid with gold. The utensils used in the temple were of bronze and gold. The curtains were fine woven wool hung on poles of cedar overlaid with gold with silver and gold rings to hold the curtains and veils in place. The embroidery on the veil in the Holy of Holies was two gigantic angels with swords of fire representing the angels that kept Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. People traveled from all over the world to see this temple even though they were not Jews. It was an amazing sight to behold. So, it was no wonder the disciples commented on the beauty of the temple, and after all, Jesus loved the temple. He had recently cleansed it of the money changers and called it His Father's house and said would be a house of prayer. So, the disciples comment about the temple was probably to lift His spirits or perhaps it was an attempt to sound spiritual. Regardless, they had to be shocked with what He said next.

In v. 6, Jesus' replied, *"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."* So they asked, *"Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"*

Matthew's Gospel fills in the blanks on the disciples' question in v. 3, *"As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'"*

Just like the Pharisees' question in Luke 17, the disciples still did not understand their question. The temple was such a majestic sight and wonder to behold and it was, after all, the dwelling place of God's glory, it was the heart of Jewish life. Everything in Israel centered on the temple and although God's glory had departed many years earlier, they thought that when this particular temple was destroyed that this would be the end of all time. They thought the Kingdom of God would be ushered in and eternity would begin and the Messiah would return and make all things right and rule the nations.

What the disciples did not understand was that the destruction of the temple did not mean the end of time and the Messiah's return and reign. They were not a single event but two separate events separated by thousands of years.

So, to help them understand, Jesus gave two answers to the disciples' questions. First, He told them about signs of the times concerning the destruction of the temple. Then, second, He told them about His return.

Yet, Jesus' main point when He spoke of the end times was not on signs of the times but on pastoral counsel in the end-times. He wanted His people remain faithful to God and hold fast to His word during these times. Look in vv. 8-11, *"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. ⁹ 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."*

Jesus said the beginning of the end begins with false messiahs lying and deceiving people. He tells them to not go after them because they are liars and deceivers. Then in v. 9 Jesus says there will be wars and tribulations on the earth but this is not the end it is only the beginning of the end.

Since Jesus' time from the Jewish religion to Christianity to Muslim religions there have been 65 recorded people who claimed to be the messiah. These are just the ones that have been recorded.¹ There have been many others from Buddhism and Hinduism not to mention other types of religions.

Then Jesus said in vv. 10-11, *"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."*

Now Jesus is talking about the end of time and He was using *end-time apocalyptic language*. It describes the calamities that will upon the earth. Wars will take place. There will be no peace for people. Earthquakes will occur in various places around the world. There will be famines where people starve and diseases will ravage the lives of people. This sounds like a report straight out

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_messiah_claimants

of the news today. Terrors and great signs in the heavens might be anything from storms, tornados, and hurricanes to eclipses of the sun and moon to meteors hitting the earth.

Then in v. 12, Jesus stopped His end-time prophecy and jumped back to a prophecy of how His disciples would be treated after He was gone. Notice what He said in v. 12, *“But before all this.”* Before all of what? Before the very end of time comes and I return you will be persecuted.

vv. 12-14, *“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. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer.”*

Here is Jesus’ prophetic pastoral counsel for His disciples as they approach the destruction of the temple. He told them they were going to be persecuted and put in prison. Indeed all of them died at the hands of the persecutors except for John and his persecution was to be exiled on rock in the sea that they called the Island of Patmos.

Yet, He tells them, that the arrests and persecutions are not out of God’s hands. They are by design and v. 13 says they trials and tribulations are opportunities designed for them to bear witness to the gospel.

He gives them pastoral counsel to get them through even in the face of death. He said don’t worry about what you will say to the authorities who will arrest you. I will be with you and I will give you the words to say. We know this to be the Holy Spirit who would speak through them.

Look in v. 15. Verse 15 says, *“I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.”* We see this prophecy answered in Acts 2 when Peter preached at Pentecost and people were amazed at this fallen disciple now a bold Apostle fearlessly preaching the gospel. The people were cut to the heart. Then in Acts 3 & 4 Peter and John preached to the people and the religious leaders arrested them and took them before the council. Then they preached to them and Acts 4:13, *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”*

Verses 16-19 is more prophecy and pastoral charge and counsel for His disciples, *“You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.”*

Jesus had told His disciples what it meant to follow Him in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone desires to come after me, let him take of his cross daily and follow me.”* To follow Jesus, you must be willing to give up your own life but now He tells them that even their dearest family members and friends would abandon them and turn them over to the authorities to be killed for the sake of the gospel.

But then comes the promise and pastoral counsel for remaining faith to the call. He said *not a hair on their head would perish.* Now that is some amazing detail that points us to the sovereignty of God to deliver His people.

The disciples had to be thinking, *“Wait, Jesus You just said we would die what do you mean we would not perish?”* Jesus meant *perish* in the sense of eternity. They would not die and go to Hell but have eternal life.

Finally, v. 19 does not mean you earn eternal life by simply holding fast but your endurance is evidence of eternal life. Don’t get this confused or your understanding will move from grace to works.

So, now we see what was going to happen to Jesus’ disciples but when was the temple going to be destroyed? Jesus told them what was going to happen to them and they didn’t even ask that question. Yet, it is relevant so that Jesus could prepare His disciples how to live in the end-times.

Jesus did not give a date for the temple’s destruction like on a tombstone, instead He gives them signs of an event. When this event occurs, the end-times are beginning to unfold.

Let’s listen to vv. 20-24 again and work slowly through the text: *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ 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, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.”*

Application: What is Jesus’ pastoral counsel for the end times? He tells us six things to pastor us through the end times.

So, you may be thinking, “*Michael, are you saying we are in the end times?*” “*Yes, that is what I am saying.*” God began the destruction of the old stone temple when Jesus, the true temple of God, was crucified and the veil in the Holy of Holies was ripped from top to bottom. God finished it in 70 A. D. when He sent the Roman army to sack Jerusalem and raze the temple to the ground.

Although Jesus’ words were to His disciples, they are also for us for we still live in the end-times. Let me make some application to Jesus’ words.

1. Hold fast to the word of God and do not be led astray by false messiahs (v. 8). Don’t be duped by some false promises of some false messiah. Everything a false messiah promises is the same old strategy the serpent used in the Garden. They make you question God’s word because they twist God’s word. Beware of anything that pulls you away from the word of God.
2. Hold fast to the word of God when the whole world is shaking (v. 9). Jesus said for us to not be terrified when we hear of wars and calamities around the world. What is going to give you comfort when you hear of these things? It is the word of God applied to your heart by the Holy Spirit of God. Even Jesus’ words in v. 9, “*these things must take place.*” He has told us that all that is written must be fulfilled according to the word of God so what is our Rock when the whole world is shaking? The word of God it is the only thing that is eternal.
3. Be a steadfast witness in the midst of tribulation (vv. 12-15). Jesus told us to settle it that we will be a witness but we do not have to rehearse it or practice it or memorize anything before we witness to kings and authorities about the gospel. Just determine to hold fast to Jesus and He will give you the words to say by His Holy Spirit when the time comes.
4. Even when family abandons you, Jesus will never abandon you. He will be with you and deliver you (vv. 16-19). My goodness, we need to meditate on these four verses in this day and age. We put so much weight on family and being loved and accepted by our family members and Jesus says right here that *when push comes to shove on the gospel*, even those dearest to us will not only abandon us but will also hate us and turn us over to be killed because of the gospel.

Just let that sink in your heart and mind. I am not bashing family and saying it is unimportant to have a close loving family but we must remember what is most important—God and His word and His people. Jesus is saying that those who at one point in our lives were so tender toward us may become terrible toward us. They may wish you were dead because you love Jesus.

Wow! When this is a storm hits your life, your life had better be built on the Rock of Jesus and His word. You better be surround by your spiritual family, the church.

Jesus final comfort for us is that while we may lose our lives that not a hair that we have (or don’t have in this life) will be accounted for in the next because your salvation is sure and complete.

5. Hold fast to Jesus and show mercy to the weak and vulnerable (vv. 23-24a). If we will have opportunities to witness before the authorities, then we also will have opportunities to show mercy to the vulnerable and witness to them as well. We do not hear it on the news but it is Christians that are mobilizing and headed to the southern border to show mercy to illegal immigrants that have flooded over the border. They are showing mercy and witnessing to the most vulnerable like pregnant mothers, young children, and the elderly. Where are the weak and vulnerable in our city? Who do you know that needs to taste the sweet mercy of God because life is crushing them?
6. Hold fast to Jesus and marvel that God has shown you mercy (v. 24b). Brothers and sisters in Christ, this period between the destruction of the temple and Jesus’ return is the time where the nations will hear the gospel. Marvel that the nations have been given this opportunity to trust Christ. When the Romans sacked Jerusalem, the Jewish believers were scattered and began to spread the gospel all around the world. What looked like destruction was actually deliverance for the nations. Even now the gospel goes forward. Nations and wicked leaders rise up and persecute Christians hoping to stop the church and the gospel and all they do is spread it like a farmer scattering seeds. It may happen here. The U. S. may be sacked and the believers scattered to ends of the earth with the gospel. What looks like defeat and destruction will actually be salvation for those who hear.

II. Jesus pastoral counsel for the end times: Be faithful to God until He returns. (Luke 21:25-38)

After Jesus answered part-one of their question, when will the temple be destroyed, then He answered part-two, which is when will the end come and what will be the signs of this event?

- Part two of their question has to do with the Messiah’s return. Look in vv. 25-28 Note: Verse 28 might sound a bit confusing to us. He says, “*when you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads.*” Was Jesus talking to the disciples or to us? The answer is “yes.”

This is prophecy and it means it has that two-fold prophetic application. The disciples would see the signs in the sun, moon, and stars. They saw it when Jesus was crucified and the earth was darkened for six hours. Yet, they would also see

distress among the nations. People since that days have been anxious about what is to come and it is this way today. So, yes, it applied to them just as it applies to us.

Even today, we see some of these events occur. There are eclipses, meteors, stars explode and are seen by telescopes and reported to the world. Hurricanes and tornados ravage the land. Tsunamis hit the coasts of nations. So, yes we see these things even today.

However, when Jesus returns there will be a shaking of the heavenly bodies, the earth, and in the nations like no one has ever seen. All other shaking of the heavenly bodies is a pointer to the ultimate shaking that will take place, for when the ultimate shaking occurs every eye will see Jesus coming on the clouds and then every mouth will confess that Jesus is the Son of God. Some will confess to their great joy and expectation. As Jesus said, we should straighten up and raise our heads because the consummation of our redemption is at hand. However, others will reluctantly confess and bow their heads and knees in shame.

So, when you see these kinds of events happen in the world, straighten up, lift up your head and remember your redemption is nearer now than it ever was.

- Then Jesus told them the parable of the fig tree in vv. 29-33.

Note: Verse 32 can make this parable confusing and complicated. What did Jesus mean when He said, *“this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.”* The debate with scholars’ centers on the word *generation* and that the phrase, *“this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.”*

There are lots of positions on the meaning of this verse. I am not going to run through all of the positions on this verse but here are a few of them. First, the word *generation* means the Jewish nation which is still here. Second, *generation* is referring to the human race which also makes it fit with the timeline of not passing away until all has been fulfilled. Third, *generation* is referring to the sun, moon, stars, and the earth. Verse 33 says the earth will pass away but God’s word will not pass away but will be fulfilled.

So, what do we make of Jesus statement, *“this generation will not pass away until all has taken place”* in v. 32? It is hard to tell with certainty but it most likely means the time of the Gentiles in v. 24, which, by in large, means all nations of all times that must hear the gospel before the Son of Man returns.

Yet, the emphasis of this parable is not on v. 32 but on v. 33, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”* Jesus’ words, the word of God will never pass away.

This is His pastoral counsel to us: No matter what is happening in the world—put your hope in God’s word, in the gospel of Jesus Christ and you will be saved. *Everything begins with the word of God and everything ends with the word of God.*

Application: Friends, God only has one event left on His calendar and that is when Jesus will return. The question is NOT when He will return but HOW will we live while we wait for Jesus’ return? Listen to Jesus pastoral counsel for living in the end times in vv. 34-36:

1. Verses 34-35: Be a vigilant follower of Jesus.

- a. *“Watch yourselves”*: Keep a close watch on your heart and your doctrine by studying the eternal word of God. Consider this, your investment in the word of God will never return void. Think of all the things you do in this life. How many things shape you into the image of Jesus. How many things can you take into the next life? Nothing but you can take the word of God with you. So, prepare yourself for Jesus return. Study the word of God and don’t forget the signs.

When you see or hear of cataclysmic events in the world, let them remind you that Jesus is coming back soon. Don’t be anxious, be reminded. Pray for those who are suffering but be encouraged.

- b. Then Jesus says, *“lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life”*: Jesus is calling us to keep thinking about His return and not be caught up in drunkenness, which will distract our focus from Him. To be *weighed down* is to be burdened by drunkenness. People will be weighed down by drunkenness for a couple of reasons: escapism and entertainment. The writer of Hebrews calls us to, *“lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Those who are distracted by the cares of this life will be surprised when Jesus returns. Verse 35 reminds us that the cares of this life will come upon all people. We are all tempted to weigh our lives down with drink, escapism, entertainment, or anxiety over the problems of our lives.

2. In v. 36, He says, *“Stay awake at all times”*: Jesus is not saying we should never sleep? Jesus is stating in the positive what He has just said in the negative. *Stay awake at all times* means to be alert. Be ready for Jesus return.

But how do we do that? Jesus said to pray. Prayer is the exercise of your faith in God. So, pray for strength to endure. Pray that you may escape the calamities and tribulations that will come. Pray that you endure to the end. Pray for those who are suffering and going through tribulations.

Again, the writer of Hebrews helps us here. Hebrews 10:23-25, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”*²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*²⁵ *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

The writer of Hebrews wrote to the church to remind them to hold fast to the gospel in the midst of persecution while we wait for Jesus’ return. *You see the gospel that saves is also the gospel that sanctifies us in waiting and sustains in suffering.*

While we wait we should be meeting with other Christians in a local church. But not just any local church. It is not that you simply show up at one church one week and another church the next week but you commit yourself to a local body in a covenant relationship in whatever way they do it and remain faithful.

Here at Grand we ask people to covenant with us and become covenant members. This way we can travel this road together as we wait for the Lord’s return. If you are a member of a local church people should know when you are missing and come after you because they love you and want to see you endure. It is in a local church where those who you know can encourage you and you can encourage them to hold fast to your confession of faith in Jesus.

Let me close by saying that Jesus is going to return to take His people home. That is good news. Don’t you look forward to the day that Jesus returns and the pressures of this life are over. The pressures of this life often leave us living for the moment and when we do we take our eyes off of Jesus.

We must live our lives in the light of eternity because when that day comes there will be no more struggle with sin and the brokenness of this world. No more battles with our sinful nature. No more physical limitations, chronic pain, cancer, weak eye sight, and crippling diseases. No more pain and suffering. No more broken relationships. No more guilt. No more tears of pain but only tears of joy. The old order of things will have passed away because we will be home. Just as Jesus raised the little girl from the dead with the words, *“Talitha cume,”* which is a term of endearment that can be translated, *“sweetheart, wake up, everything is okay.”* He will say these words to us. He will say, *“I have come to get you now welcome home.”*

Don’t you look forward to the day when you get home and you receive the embrace of the Lord Jesus. He will wipe away every tear from your eyes, heal every hurt, and give you your reward.

Friend if you have never trusted Christ, studying a passage like this reminds us there is an urgency to entering the kingdom of God. In Luke 9, Jesus had called people to follow Him but many made excuses. One man wanted to go home and wait until his father died and then follow Jesus. One had gotten married and so he wanted to wait. Friend, there is no time to wait. It is urgent that you follow Jesus now and enter the Kingdom of God. Don’t let the end come up on you like a trap you did not expect. Jesus has given you pastoral counsel—trust Him alone for salvation.