

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 21:5-28

Though you are probably getting tired of the reminder, I'm going to remind you, yet again, that the setting/context of this passage is Jerusalem, the week of Passover, so lots of people were pilgrimaging into town for the holiday/festivities. Though Passover celebrations had been going on for centuries, this particular one would be different. We now know it as Passion Week, when the true Passover Lamb would be offered for the sins of the world.

So we find Jesus and the disciples amidst the hub-bub that surrounded Passover, and Jesus was continuing His ministry in the temple area. The disciples noted the beauty and impressiveness of the temple (21:5)—and this was not the first time they had seen it, so it must have been breathe-taking to keep ogling over it when they had seen it many times before.

Jesus, however, was less than impressed. Which should be expected. After all, the temple, the sacrificial system, all the festivals, the law, Judaism as a whole, had one primary purpose...to point people in the direction of Him. And there He was, and people were missing the point. In fact, they had missed the point so bad, that judgment was coming. Everything Jesus states in the rest of chapter 21 should be understood as outlining, and preparing them for, the judgement to come. As was pointed out in the sermon, when we approach this passage it is challenging to figure out what part(s) are speaking of the judgement that would be levied on Israel in the near future, and what is still to come, even into our future? Scholars debate this question at great length, and there is much room for disagreement. So I offer this brief outline with the understanding that not everyone agrees with it.

21:8-9 (both near and far)

21:10-11 (near)

21:12-19 (both near and far)

21:20-24 (near)

21:25-28 (far)

To clarify, "near" means in the near future of the original hearers, and "far" means in the far-off future for them, (which can include the past, present, and/or future from the reference point of today.)

But, let's not get overly concerned with the timing of any of this (though historically it is good to keep in mind that much of this was fulfilled in 70 AD...so about 40 years after the time Jesus said it, and within a decade of Luke penning his gospel). What we should focus our attention on are the exhortations, encouragement, and instructions that Jesus offered which are right and true in any time and place.

Notice the important phrase in verse 9, *"...do not be frightened..."* (NIV) Chaos and confusion are par for the course in much of the human experience. Though we ("we" being people who have spent most of our lives in late 20th/early 21st century America) have experienced more peace and stability than most humans, historically speaking, we do know (thanks to the global media and the rise of social media...and even the relatively tumultuous 2017 that we've

experienced) that the world can be very unstable. In fact, our experience is pretty rare. This world can be down-right frightening. BUT, Jesus says, *“do not be frightened”*. We (“we” being Christians in any time and place) need to always remember Who is in charge, that He is actively involved in His world, and what He told us to expect in this life/world. The words of Jesus in John 16:33 go well with the passage at hand, *“I told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* (NIV).

The next verse I’d like to draw your attention to is verse 13, *“This will result in your being witnesses to them.”* (NIV). The word for “witnesses” here in the Greek is the word “marturion” from where we get the word “martyr” from. To witness or to testify, to be a witness or a testifier, all come from the same root word. Jesus is telling them (and by extension us) that whatever conditions, circumstances, situations we as Christ-followers find ourselves in we are to bear witness to the fact that He is Lord and Savior. We do so by living a life that demonstrates His Kingship, and being willing to die if necessary to demonstrate that He is our Savior. This has always been part of the Christian faith. We come from a long heritage and legacy of martyrs. The challenge, however, is that the relative ease that we live in today has caused us to become soft. Sadly, in our country, we find more “Christians” who are willing to fight for “our way of life” (meaning easy, comfortable, secure, convenient) than who are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of Jesus and His Kingdom. We want to find ways to avoid the conditions that might make us actually have to choose between being witnesses/martyrs or not. But Jesus told us to expect such conditions.

This leads to the last verse I want to highlight. *“By standing firm you will gain life.”* (21:19 NIV). From my observation and vantage point, again, it seems the typical American Christian is willing to work hard to create favorable conditions for ourselves so that we aren’t really tested and required to *“stand firm”*. We are just like any other Americans who want to “fight for our rights”, as opposed to being willing to suffer for the precious name of Jesus. The implied question that Jesus always invites people into is, “What is the sort of life that is truly life?” Having everything this world has to offer, Jesus says, is not where true life is found.

It is interesting to me that neither Jesus nor Paul ever prepare their listeners/readers for prosperity. But they do go out of their way to prepare them for adversity. I take that to mean that being faithful to Jesus will naturally lead to adversity and opposition. And the way to deal with such adversity and opposition is the way of the cross (not the way of the sword). As the ancient church father Tertullian said, *“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”*, and more recently, George Ladd said, *“The church must always in its essential character be a martyr church.”* As was stated in the sermon yesterday, “the worst tragedies can be the best opportunities.” That’s more than pie in the sky, wishful thinking. That is true because of the reality of Jesus and His Kingdom...and, again, it points use toward His way of accomplishing things—the way of the cross.

So if we are going to dare pray, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*, we need to soberly understand what they may mean on our part. How badly do we

want to see His Kingdom come? What price are we willing to pay? Not that we go looking for persecution, but realizing that being faithful to Jesus tends to bring it in our direction...so let's not fear, let's be witnesses, let's stand firm.

- Q. As you consider the conditions we live in, how are they helpful to the cause of Christ, and how do they hinder the cause of Christ?**
- Q. Are you more apt to spend energy trying to make conditions more favorable, or spend energy trying to figure out how to be faithful within the conditions? (Explain)**
- Q. Societally/culturally speaking, what has you frightened? (or at least concerned?)**
- Q. Together describe, as specifically as you can, what a faithful Christian is like. How do you compare to the prototype you just depicted?**
- Q. How have you seen great opportunity come from great tragedy? (You can take the qualified "great" off if it hinders you.)**
- Q. (possible icebreaker) What is the most impressive man-made creation that you've ever seen/experienced? What was it that impressed you so?**
- Q. If you were told that within a generation the United States as we know it would be gone, how would you react? What would you think/feel? What would you do? (This was basically what Jesus was telling His listeners would happen to Jerusalem.)**