

Test of Faith
11.13.16

Luke 21:5-19 New Living Translation (NLT)

5 Some of his disciples began talking about the majestic stonework of the Temple and the memorial decorations on the walls. But Jesus said, 6 “The time is coming when all these things will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”

7 “Teacher,” they asked, “when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to take place?”

8 He replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and saying, ‘The time has come!’ But don’t believe them. 9 And when you hear of wars and insurrections, don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place first, but the end won’t follow immediately.” 10 Then he added, “Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be great earthquakes, and there will be famines and plagues in many lands, and there will be terrifying things and great miraculous signs from heaven.

12 “But before all this occurs, there will be a time of great persecution. You will be dragged into synagogues and prisons, and you will stand trial before kings and governors because you are my followers. 13 But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. 14 So don’t worry in advance about how to answer the charges against you, 15 for I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute you! 16 Even those closest to you—your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends—will betray you. They will even kill some of you. 17 And everyone will hate you because you are my followers. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish! 19 By standing firm, you will win your souls.

Leader: The Word of God for the People of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

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Opening story

Sometimes we take our eyes off Jesus. And we forget what is most important.

Scripture summary - Luke 21.5-19

In this passage from Luke, Jesus tells His followers about the future. The Disciples don't seem interested in hearing about the future. Instead, they are more concerned with the present - in particular, the beauty of the Temple. Their worship center. Their Holy Place. Their sacred sanctuary. (Life Application Bible, NRSV, © 1990 Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton IL; Luke 21, p. 1800-1801)

Herod's Temple, begun 40 + years before, was not finished. But it was well on its way to be one of the wonders of the world. Some of its huge blocks of green or white marble measured 67 ½ ft long, 7 ½ ft high and 9 ft wide.

Some walls or portions of walls were covered with gold plate, flashing brightly in the eastern sky. Gleaming for all to see.

The rest was white - causing ones from a distance to believe it was a snow-covered mountain.

Inside the Temple were "rich ornaments" and "votive offerings" - otherwise known as "permanent memorials"... gifts from the rich and famous of the time. (Interpreter's Bible, © 1952 Pierce and Smith; Abingdon Press; NY, Nashville' Vol. viii, Luke/John; pp. 360- 367)

Some of the Disciples discussed the beauty of the Temple.

"Look at the beautiful stonework. The majestic pipes. The awe-inspiring stained-glass. The memorial altar and historical artifacts. Isn't it absolutely stunning?"

Jesus responded: *"All will be destroyed. No stone will be left standing."*

Common English Bible Study Bible; © 2013 Common English Bible; Joel Green, Gen. Editor; Luke 21 p. 155 NT

It is possible that Jesus' words parallel the prophets Micah (Micah 3.12) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26.6;18) regarding the Destruction of the first Temple "as a consequence of the people's refusal to repent."

"This prediction may (also) have been the basis of the charge brought by 'false witnesses' against Jesus at the trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14.57-58; John 2. 18-19; Acts 6.13-14) (Interpreter's Bible, © 1952 Pierce and Smith; Abingdon Press; NY, Nashville' Vol. viii, Luke/John; pp. 360- 367)

You see, Jesus was not impressed with its beauty 2000 years ago. Not that He didn't care. It wasn't that important to Him. He didn't say the Temple SHOULD'N'T be beautiful and cared for. It just wasn't a high priority. Besides, He said, *it won't last forever. One day soon, it would be a pile of rubble.* So, in other words, *DON'T GET SO ENRAPT AND DISTRACTED by buildings, architecture and things. They won't last forever. Don't lose sight of the most important things in life. Buildings crumble. Beauty fades. Memorial gifts will eventually be forgotten.*

Jesus continues: *“The day is coming when you will face persecution for your faith. At that point, these things will not matter.”*

“When you stand before God on the Judgment Day, you will not be accountable for HOW nice of a building you Built. Or How clean you kept it.”

What matters then is “On WHAT are you standing?” “Where is your faith?” “In Whom do you Trust?”

Are you standing on the Solid Rock? Or Sinking Sand?

I can hear the words of that great hymn:

*My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.*

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand. (“My Hope is Built” Edward Mote)

Jesus, the Solid Rock, warns His Followers:

“Difficult times are coming.”

“So don’t be deceived! False prophets will scare you. Don’t panic!”

“Bad things will happen. You’ll be arrested and persecuted because of Your faith in Me. There will be wars, famines, earthquakes, great unrest, signs in the sky.”

“This will be an opportunity for you to witness to your faith.

“Don’t worry about writing a speech in your defense. Trust the Holy Spirit to give you the right words at the right time.”

“Be ready for opposition. Your own family (brothers, sisters, parents, children, relatives) and friends will hate you. Betray you. Kill you.”

“Everyone will hate you because of Me.”

“But not a hair of your head will be lost.”

“So stand firm in the midst of challenging and difficult circumstances and these Tests of Faith. Trust Me. Put your hope in Me. and You will live.”

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Stories of Faithfulness

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul. (Illustrations Unlimited, James Hewett, Editor; © 1988 James Hewett. Collection of stories, quotations and humor. ch. 64 “God’s Care and Guidance” #4 “Saved Alone”)

Can we say with Horatio Spafford: *“I am glad to be able to trust my Lord when it costs me something.”*?

As God’s Beloved Children, we are dearly loved and accepted just as we are. We are called to follow. We are called to trust God completely. Even in the most difficult circumstances, even when we face our greatest test of faith, let us put our trust in the Solid Rock, Jesus Christ, the Source of our Hope. Amen.