

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Luke 21:5-19 (EHV)

⁵ As some were talking about the temple, how it was decorated with beautiful stones and offerings, Jesus said, ⁶“These things that you see here—the days will come when there will not be one stone left on another—every one will be thrown down.”

⁷ They asked him, “Teacher, when will these things happen? And what is the sign that these things are about to happen?”

⁸ He said, “Watch out so that you are not deceived! For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them. ⁹ Whenever you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified, for these things must happen first, but the end will not be right then.”

¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, famines, and plagues in various places. There will be horrifying sights and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, handing you over to synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name’s sake. ¹³ It will turn out to be your opportunity to testify. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand how to defend yourselves, ¹⁵ for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends. They will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all people for my name’s sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By patient endurance you will gain your lives.

Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so that we won’t despair in times of trouble but will endure in our faithful hope and share this same hope with others, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There’s a couple of important lessons we might learn from today’s text:

Firstly, most of us are easily impressed.

Secondly, most of us are easily frightened, especially when those impressive things are threatened.

We can know this because Jesus’ disciples were impressed by the imposing and extraordinary-looking temple in Jerusalem. It was the third Jewish temple to be built on this most holy site, and many would argue it was the most impressive of them all. In fact, it was counted as one of the wonders of the world at the time.

But what frightens the disciples is Jesus tells them this impressive edifice is going to be destroyed.

Jesus continues the bad news by warning them of wars, disasters, famines, diseases, and persecutions. Not only this, but some of those who believe in the name of Jesus will be delivered up by their own family members which will result in some of them dying for their faith. No doubt the disciples were terrified by such news!

History tells us the temple was destroyed in 70AD. There have been (and will continue to be) natural disasters, wars, and epidemics. Many Christians are still persecuted for their faith in Christ.

In other words, what Jesus told his disciples has come true, and will continue to be true.

Like the disciples, we too are easily impressed by things which don’t last. In fact, we may be tempted to place our faith in the impressive things around us. This also means we may also be easily frightened when any of these impressive things are threatened or taken away.

For example, it’s easy to be impressed by new devices, cars, and technology, even though we know sooner or later they’ll break down or fail to do what they were designed to do.

It's easy to be impressed by all the latest health and beauty products which promise to make us feel better about our bodies, despite the fact we know we're all getting older and our bodies will continue to creak and groan and sag and wrinkle.

Now, please don't misunderstand what's being said here. We may need that next gadget or car or machine. We may need to look after our bodies, practice good hygiene, take helpful medicines, and seek to maintain a healthy lifestyle while we can. But we also need to be careful where we place our trust, because sooner or later everything we have or hope for will be threatened.

As Jesus warned us, floods and fire and seasonal changes will continue to affect our livelihoods. Nations will fight against other nations. Disease and virus and cancers and other ailments will threaten our health. And we'll experience conflict with people, including members of our own families, for believing in Jesus.

Jesus tells us these types of things will happen, and he's never said anything that isn't true. But when they happen, we may be tempted to become frightened, anxious, or lose hope.

The reason we become so upset when such things happen is because we may have unknowingly put our hope and trust in these impressive things.

We may have reckoned as long as we got what we wanted, as long as we have the latest gadget, as long as we followed the latest health or beauty advice, as long as we follow the latest church program which promises full churches, or as long as everybody did all the right things, we were going to be happy, fulfilled, and secure.

But, like the temple in Jerusalem, all the earthly and temporal things which impress us or promise so much joy, peace, success, and contentment, don't last. Sooner or later, everything we've unknowingly placed our hope in, will come tumbling down. We're not to place our trust in the things of this world, no matter how impressive they might be.

Not only this, but for those who believe in the name of Jesus, it seems our lot is going to be worse because we'll not only have to suffer all these things like everyone else, but we're also going to be persecuted for our faith in Jesus – including persecution by some of our own family members!

Yet, as we hear this bad news, Jesus tells us not to be afraid.

But what he says next is completely unexpected!

You see, we might expect him to say, "When all these things happen, don't worry, because everything happens for a reason", or "When these things happen and it seems like a door closes, well, that's when a window opens", or some other pat answer we often give each other, which are all ultimately empty of hope or comfort.

But he doesn't say any of these clichés.

Instead, he tells us when all these terrible things happen...we have an opportunity to testify about the God in whom we trust!

What a strange and unexpected thing to say!

This means, when the world is collapsing, when the things we've put our trust in goes bust, when people are worried about the future, or when people betray us and hurt us because we believe in Jesus, he tells us to bear witness of the sure and unchanging hope we have in Jesus!

In other words, when troubles surround us and we're being threatened, this isn't the time to plunk our head in the sand and hope it all goes away. It's not the time to go hide in a corner with like-minded people. It's not the time to throw our hands in the air in despair. It's not the time to gripe and groan like everyone else. Instead, our troubled times are the *best* times to share our unchanging and everlasting faith and hope in Christ!

Therefore, in times of trouble, hardship, tragedy, chaos, and persecution, we, the people of God, who are safe and secure in the knowledge of our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, can offer a real and certain hope to those around us.

You see, as people who trust Jesus Christ, we're not afraid because, no matter what happens in our life, our hope is secure in Christ alone, and we want to share this everlasting hope and peace with those around us.

This means we don't offer pat answers or shallow platitudes like everyone else. We don't offer sentimental clichés. Instead, we offer the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ.

While Jesus tells us not to plan what we're going to say beforehand, we might tell them Jesus died for the forgiveness of all our sins which means none of our tragedies are sent as punishment.

We might tell them about Jesus who is with us always in good times and bad. He never abandons us but suffers with us.

We might tell them about Jesus who wasn't defeated by death or the devil but rose victorious from death and still lives eternally.

We might tell them of Jesus who didn't argue or give up in the face of false accusations and persecution. He patiently endured all this for our sake.

We might tell them Jesus assures us he won't let the hairs of our heads perish (which might be more important to some than others!). Since he cares so much for our hair, how much more does he also care for the rest of our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls!

We might tell them that, even if we die, we have a sure hope in the resurrection of the dead and life eternal with Jesus.

If anything, all our troubles should drive us back to the comfort and certainty of Jesus Christ, who freely forgives us for all our sins, who adopts us as dearly beloved children of God, who makes us righteous and holy, and who gives us the results of his victory over sin, death, and evil through faith.

While most people are easily impressed and frightened, Jesus warns us not to be too impressed by fancy buildings and all those other things which distract us from the hope we have in him. We're also not to be afraid.

As his disciples, we know many things will happen which will spread fear into people's hearts. But, as his beloved disciples, we're not to be scared by the things we experience in this world.

Instead, we're to trust in the everlasting love and forgiveness of God who cares for us: individually and communally. We're to trust his promise that no-one can snatch us out of his hands. We're to trust the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of all our sin and the promise of eternal life without having to earn it. We're to trust his eternal love and mercy, which means we have nothing to fear.

Then, as cared for and loved people who are safe in Christ, we naturally want to share the hope and love of God with those around us, especially when they need to hear it the most. And they need to hear it

whenever their temporary and earthly foundations are shaken and collapsing.

Just as Christ is our hope in times of danger and chaos, he's also the only true and lasting hope people in this world need, and God knows many people need it right now!

So yes, many are easily impressed, and many are also easily frightened, but Jesus tells us not to be led astray or deceived by the devil, the world, or even by our own self-centred flesh. No matter what we face, we know and trust our Lord Jesus Christ has forgiven us, saved us, loves us, cares for us, and will take us home to be with him in his eternal kingdom where chaos and evil and death has no place.

In this way, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, the living temple who can never be destroyed. Amen.

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