

Sermon 09-26-2025
How to prepare for the end? – Rev. Markus Wegenast
Luke 21:5-19

⁵ When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶ “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

⁷ They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” ⁸ And he said, “**Beware that you are not led astray**, for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’^[a] and, ‘The time is near!’^[b] Do not go after them.

⁹ “When you hear of wars and insurrections, **do not be terrified**, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹ there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹² “But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ This will give you an opportunity to **testify**. ¹⁴ **So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance**, ¹⁵ for I will give you words^[c] and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ **By your endurance you will gain your souls**.

1)

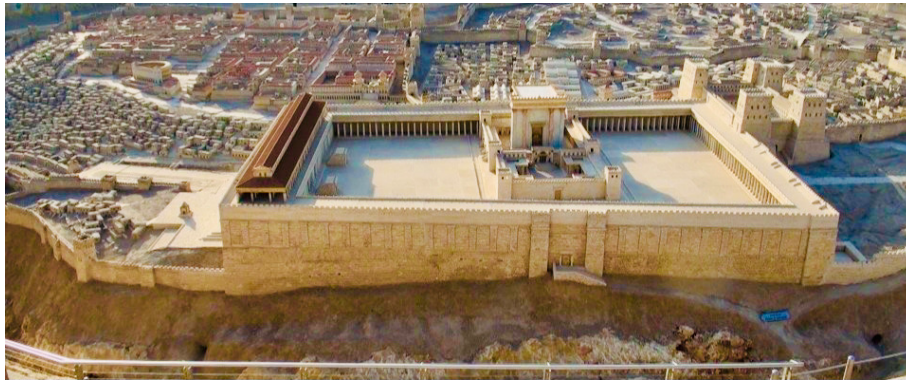
I have to tell you: I did not expect that this November would expose us to such challenging themes in the Bible. Often I develop my own sermon series for our church but sometimes I want to follow the lectionary that other churches in North America follow too. Last week’s lectionary exposed us to the theme of life after death. I hope you found comfort and peace in that but I’m sure that it had uncomfortable parts too as we addressed an end of life topic. Today we hear Jesus talk about end-times in general and upcoming future destruction – that is challenging too.

I invite you to trust God in all of this. Please embrace the expectation that God has a word for you today. Please trust that there is something in today’s church service and this sermon that you need to hear at this point of your life. I believe this is the best way to come to worship: to have the expectation that God will speak to you; wait for it, search for it...

Let’s take a look at what’s going on in today’s Bible reading.

Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem with his disciples. It’s his final week of ministry, just a few days before his crucifixion. They spend the day in the holy city of Jerusalem at the magnificent temple. They are amazed by it. The disciples had seen the temple before but every time you stand before this masterpiece of architecture, you can’t help but marvel.

The temple had stood there for over a 1000 years. It’s been demolished once, rebuilt, and then later greatly updated and renovated. By the time that Jesus lived it was huge – a building like none other; certainly the largest and greatest building in Israel and one of the top sites in the entire middle east.



This is what the temple looked like at Jesus time. What I like about this image is that it shows the proportional size compared to the rest of the city. Keep in mind that Jerusalem was one of the biggest cities in the world at that time (maybe on 8th place but during Passover it could swell to a population large than that of Rome, the largest city at that time)!

The temple was originally built by King Solomon in around 950 BC. It was beautiful *then* – the country prospered at his time and put a lot of resources into building it. They wanted to build a building worthy of a God who led them out of captivity in Egypt; they no longer wanted God to live in a tent. So Solomon built!

In 586 BC the temple got destroyed by the Babylonians and was nothing but a pile of rubble; they rebuilt it 70 years later. It wasn't quite as grand as before, similar but just not as great as it originally was. But then, about 500 years later, King Herod the Great came along – yes the very Herod from the Christmas story that tried to kill baby Jesus. He was a pretty mean king, but he truly understood how to build great buildings.

He poured a lot – a lot – of resources into making the existing temple the new wonder of the middle East again. I mean, imagine that: Israel was a tiny country and yet their temple was known in the entire Mediterranean region for its grandeur. That tells you something about the role of faith in Jewish society.

Herod's temple was beautifully adorned and in addition was just huge. When they renovated it they hauled stones up to and over 50 tons heavy just to lay a new foundation. When archeologists unearthed the ancient foundation just a few decades ago someone suggested that these huge stones must have been placed by angels because they are so heavy!!

These are the stones of which Jesus says:

“...the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” – Luke 21:6

Of course it would create some panic among the disciples to hear Jesus say that. How can it not? Put yourself into their shoes. What is a building that you greatly admire?

COS? Bethesda North hospital? Lambeau field or the Red's stadium? Maybe the Washington national cathedral or the capitol building? Imagine you have a trusted friend that goes there with you and tells you: *"not one stone will be left upon another."*

It must have been a shock to hear Jesus say that the magnificent temple would be destroyed.

Jesus had what can best be described a kind of a love/hate relationship with the temple. He didn't criticize that it was huge, after all the building of the temple was a super important part of the OT Bible. What he did criticize was when the temple became an end in itself and not a means to draw near to God.

He scolded any attempt that would exclude people from using the temple as a house of prayer (...). But for him to foretell the complete destruction of one of the most revered and marvelous buildings in the world – that was different.

So of course, the disciples can't let that comment just stand there – they have to do a follow up:

"Teacher, when will this be?" – Luke 21:7

2)

This is a justified question. You would ask the same thing, right?

Jesus uses the fair question the disciples ask to give a much more far-reaching answer than the disciples may have expected. He could have just given them a date: "When will it happen that the temple gets destroyed? In 4 years on June 5th!" But that's not what Jesus is doing here – he wants his disciples - and us - to learn something much more general about our lives and our faith in this world.

Take a look at Jesus' response. Instead of giving a date, he gives a talk and in this talk there are not only scary pieces of information about the future, there are also some very explicit instructions on what to do.

➤ *Point out all underlined words in bulletin*

I'm not sure if the disciples were ready to listen to these instructions. They may've been distracted by the terrifying news that the temple will be destroyed and that even more calamities were waiting for them.

Maybe that's your situation too. Maybe you too have a hard time paying attention to the instructions that Jesus has for you because you are wondering what your future holds.

So let's do a little bit of history before we look at these practical instructions. We live in the year 2025, we know when the destruction of the temple came. It came about 40 years later, in 70 AD:

The Israeli government and people rose against the official governing authority of Rome. Rome did not take that lightly, they made an example of Israel to show the entire Mediterranean world: You don't mess with Rome, if you do, this will happen:



- The Romans came, they besieged Jerusalem for a long time and finally tore it down. They destroyed the beautiful temple – not one stone was left above the other and this is still true today in the year 2025. It was a brutal calamity, 1000s of men, women and children died. Many died during the 5-month siege already of starvation, many more were killed when the Romans broke through the walls and destroyed the city and the temple.

World history changed after that. The world, including our culture, would look entirely different if the Jews never would have had to leave their homeland – but that's a different story.

Our story today is that the destruction that Jesus foretold was fulfilled in 70AD. But I believe that when you hear the words that Jesus spoke, as a Christian – you also hear another theme emerge. It's a theme we find throughout the New Testament. We hear the theme of *our* future and the expectations of the end times.

So what are we dealing with in today's Bible lesson? Does Jesus talk about the events of the first Christian persecutions and 70 AD or does Jesus talk about our future? The answer lies somewhere in between. It's a "both...and" and that's important because it means that the instructions that Jesus is giving here are instructions that are relevant for us too.

God speaks through Jesus to all of us. God has spoken to millions of people throughout history with these instructions. The destruction and perils that Jesus foretold were not limited to the year 70AD. Each generation has their own peril and destruction, and God wants us to hear his words and find meaning and help.

3)

The title of this sermon is: How to prepare for the end? So let's answer this Jesus style:

How to prepare for the end:

- "Beware that you are not led astray"

Being led astray is a universally good instruction that fits into all and any time period. I would say that we currently live in a time period and culture where being led astray is almost something like a daily occurrence:

Commercials, telemarketers, scam calls...

But also even much more subtle. I recently said that one of the great challenges that I feel I'm often faced with is that our standards for what is wrong and what is right are challenged.

Just a mild example: Tesla! It was celebrated as a front runner company to save the planet and people were applauded for driving one but when Elon Musk fell out of favor with segments of the public it became an affront to some people when they'd see one. It's confusing fast changing times we live in! It's easy to get led astray when norms change so quickly.

Jesus had a much greater concern: He does not want us to get led astray on who he is (...). For me there is only one way to make sure I believe in the right Jesus. For me it means sticking with the Jesus that some friends of mine introduced to me, I never met those friends but you may have heard of them: Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James and Jude – they did a great job to show me the real Jesus!

Beware that you're not let astray, stick with the Jesus of the Bible and the ethics that he has given you.

The most helpful advice Jesus gives I find though is the next one:

- "Do not be terrified"

Can you be told not to be terrified? If a child crawls into their parents' bed at night because there's a thunderstorm, parents don't have the power to take fear away from their child. But they can comfort, and in their comfort they say something like: Don't be afraid – it's just thunder. That doesn't make the thunder go away or any less scary to the child. It may even be a dangerous thunderstorm that can cause severe damage – but by naming it the parents help their child to process what's going on and to better deal with the situation.

This is what Jesus is doing for us. He names that in this world there is trouble, sometimes severe trouble. But in this same world there is he and he tells us not to be afraid. Not because there's nothing to be afraid of, but because being afraid does not put us in the position to encounter that which terrifies us. Does that make sense to you? Fear paralyzes; Jesus frees – don't be afraid, listen to Jesus and follow him.

- **“Testify ... make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance”**

Isn't that a curious instruction. Our headline reads how to prepare for the end and here we hear Jesus say: don't prepare! The context is about testifying. Testifying is another word for giving an account of your faith and hope. Throughout history there have been many times when believers had to explain themselves – sometimes there can be severe persecution and accusation, sometimes it's in a friendly setting where a friend wants to find out what you believe.

Depending on your personality you may want to be prepared for such occasions. I hope it encourages you to hear Jesus say that it's not always necessary to have everything neatly lined up. Sometimes in life we just need to trust that with God we can be spontaneous in saying the right thing at the right time.

And finally:

- **“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”**

In V 16 Jesus said that some of his disciples – present and future – will be put to death. But then he says that not a hair of your head will perish. How does that make sense?

Harm can befall anyone – no matter how much or how little someone believes, no one is invincible. Throughout history people of faith have experienced that Jesus is not always coming for the kind of rescue we'd like to see. Sometimes terrible things happen.

It is in endurance that we find out that Jesus is never late – because Jesus is sovereign even when harm befalls us. There is another rescue that is coming our way in which indeed not a single hair can be damaged. What did we learn last Sunday: Our bodies will all eventually die, but no matter in what manner we die, to God we are alive and in the end he will raise the very bodies that have been harmed – including our hair I guess - to new life!

➤ *Restate all four statements*

Wow, that was a long message! I hope you didn't fall asleep. If you did, I hope that you did hear just what you needed to hear for today.

God loves you – God wants you to be equipped for all the wonderful and the terrifying things your life holds. When the disciples were told that the magnificent temple of their time would eventually be destroyed it must have been a huge shock for them. Shocks are part of life – but so is Jesus. May you find all the that you need in him – from now on and until the very end. Amen.