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Luke 21:5-38

The Certain Gospel: How To Survive The End Of The World

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What's your worst fear when you're a child? Quicksand. There's nothing like quicksand to strike fear in the heart of a child. I can't wait to tell Elijah about quicksand. This week I came across a **wonderful game** published in 2001 called *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Game*.¹ It teaches you how to survive bad things that can happen. So I thought, let's play a little game today. Let's see how well you would do surviving some worst-case scenarios. I thought I'd start with **sharks** since there have been a couple shark attacks on **Cape Cod** this summer. .

1. How to fend off a shark:

- A. Make repeated quick, sharp jabs in the eyes or gills.
- B. Punch or kick it in the nose.
- C. Grab and hold one or both pectoral fins.

The correct answer is "A. Make repeated quick, sharp jabs in the eyes or gills." I thought it was B or a combination of A and B. Now some of you may prefer a more **tropical or jungle destination**.

2. How to fend off a man-eating tiger:

- A. Wear a face mask on the back of your head.
- B. Rub elephant dung or urine on your clothing.
- C. Cover your body with crushed garlic; the smell repels tigers.

The correct answer is "A. Wear a face mask on the back of your head." I think dousing yourself in crushed garlic may just make you taste better. Now for those of you who are really serious about survival.

3. How to foil a UFO abduction:

- A. Never travel alone in the woods. No UFO abduction has ever involved more than seven people.
- B. Dress like a tourist and carry cameras and a map. Appear willing to go with the aliens.
- C. Focus your thoughts toward the alien. Tell it, "Leave me alone. Go away, I have a virus."

Apparently, the correct answer is, "C. Go away, I have a virus." I'm not sure what research they did in the late 90s to make them feel qualified to report this, but there you go. Did anyone survive sharks, tigers, and UFOs? Nicely done. Now I want to give you one more question that I wrote up.

4. How to survive the end of the world:

- A. Invest in a bunker or be the first to colonize Mars.
- B. Live life to the fullest now because there's no escape.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

C. The only way to survive the end of the world is with Jesus.

So what do you think the correct answer is? I bet none of you are digging out a **bunker** or job hunting at **SpaceX**, but **maybe** you are **living every day like it's your last** and not thinking about tomorrow. As Jesus shows us in our passage, neither of those are the best answer. The best answer is, "C. The only way to survive the end of the world is with Jesus."

Today Jesus tells **his audience** and **us** about the end of the **temple in Jerusalem** and the **end of the world**. And when I say "end of the world" I don't mean that the world will be completely gone because **Revelation 21:1-4** promises a **new heaven** and **new earth**, but I mean the day Christ returns and **this present world ends**. Today's passage can be kind of confusing so I thought I would start by **outlining its structure** to give you a bit more clarity as we go through it. **Outline of Luke 21:5-38:**

v5-24: Jesus prophesies the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

This destruction serves as a "**pattern**" or "**type**" or "**sign**" of an even **greater future destruction**.²

v25-28: Jesus prophesies the end of the world at his return.

The destruction of the temple serves as a **smaller example** of a **bigger event**, the **destruction** and **judgment** experienced at the **end of days**.

v29-33: Jesus assures his audience these things will take place.

Jesus uses the **parable** of the **fig tree** to do so.

v34-38: Jesus tells his audience how to live in light of these things.

So what? What **difference** does this make for my life? He addresses those who would be willing to give themselves to "partying" or "living life to the fullest now" because they know what is coming.

Instead of preaching this passage **verse by verse** or **section by section** I want to take the big picture and draw out what Jesus has to say for **us today** about **preparing for Christ's return**. I want to do this by answering **four questions**: 1) What will happen? 2) When will it happen? 3) How do we know it will happen? 4) How can I be ready?

1) What will happen?

Jesus prophesies the **destruction of the temple** and the **end times** during **passion week**, between his arrival in Jerusalem and when he is **crucified**. Jesus is teaching at the temple when his disciples say how great the temple building is (v5).³ In **Mark 13:1b** one of his disciples says, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (NIV®)

The temple was really **impressive**. There are no more stones left from the temple itself, but we still have stones that form the **temple mount** where it was built.⁴ The largest stone, the Western Stone, is **10 feet high, 6-12 feet deep, and 45 feet long**.⁵ It weighs approximately **517 tonnes, or 1,139,789 pounds**. That's the size of **200 elephants** or **two 747 jumbo jets** packed full.⁶ It's one of the biggest stones ever laid and no one knows how they did it. The temple itself was just as impressive and beautiful.

You can see why the Jewish people took such **pride** in the temple. It was a symbol of Israel's **honor** but also of God's **presence** with them, or **so they thought**. I think the disciples are showing us what the people of Israel had begun to **love** and **value the most**, the **objects of their religion**, the **temple**, the **rituals**, the **tradition**. They loved their temple but they **rejected Jesus**, God himself. Thus, Jesus prophesies:

Luke 21:6 “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.” (NIV®)

I listened to one pastor this week who compared **church buildings** to **lunch bags**.⁷ I think a better comparison is **lunch boxes**. Lunch boxes can be really **cool**. You can get **Star Wars** lunch boxes and **Disney Princess** lunch boxes, but today they look more like **cool packs**. But no matter how sweet your lunch box is, what really matters is the **food** inside it, what gives you **nourishment**. We are so **blessed** to be able to use this building, and we should work hard to take care of it, but what matters most is the **ministry** this building **enables**. I went back and counted all the times I have posted photos of our Cornerstone building on **Instagram**. At least **17 times**... and I'll probably post more. It's **okay** to **appreciate** and **enjoy** what God has given us, but only so long as we remember that we have it so we can **serve** him with it.

Jesus wants to snap the people out of their love for their temple and back to **faithfully loving God**. Jesus **graphically** foretells the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in v20-24. People should **flee** the city because of how awful it's going to be. It will be really bad if you're **pregnant** or **nursing**. People will **die** or be taken as **prisoners**. When the **Roman emperor Titus** attacked Jerusalem in **70 AD** the historian **Josephus** said it was utter destruction. Despite **siege** and **famine** Titus took the city and burned the temple.

“No pity was shown on account of age or out of respect for anyone’s dignity—children and elderly, lay people and priests alike were slain. The battle surged ahead and surrounded everybody, including both those who begged for mercy and those who resisted. The flames spread out to a great distance and its noise mixed with the groans of the perishing; and such was the height of the ridge and the magnitude of the burning that one would have imagined the whole city was aflame” - Josephus (Wars 6.5.1). (quoted from Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible)⁸

Rome takes 97,000 captive but crucified, burned alive, or killed with the sword 1,100,000 people, including men, women, children, the elderly and the feeble.⁹ It was **genocide**. This is just a **drop in the bucket** of the final judgment. It's just a **small taste** of the end Christ Jesus will bring at the last days against Satan and those who have rejected him. It won't be genocide but it will be **global** and **devastating**. *The destruction of the temple is a picture of the final judgement and it reminds us to prioritize Jesus and his ministry first.*

2) When will it happen?

When Jesus says the temple is going to be destroyed, the disciples ask him **when** it's going to happen (v7). And Jesus, of course, doesn't answer. Instead, he gives them **Signs of Jerusalem's Destruction**:

- **v9**: They will hear of wars and uprisings.
- **v10**: Nations will rise against nation and kingdoms against kingdoms.
- **v11**: There will be great earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and other heavenly signs.
- **v12, 16**: Jesus' followers will experience persecution, suffering, betrayal, and even death.

We see lots of persecution happening in Acts (Acts 4:5-12; 22:18). If we look at verses 25 through 28 we see similar **Signs of the Last Times**:

- **v25a**: There will be cosmic signs in the sun, moon, and stars (un-creation of the world, anti-Genesis 1).
- **v25b**: Nations will be in anguish and chaos will rage on land and sea.
- **v26**: People will be afraid and the heavens will shake.

Jesus doesn't tell us when he's coming back, only that he is coming back (v27).

Matthew 24:36, 42 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father... Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. (NIV®)

Do any of you remember when **Harold Camping** predicted Jesus would come back on December 21st, 2012? I remember driving through **Lynn** and seeing a big **billboard** saying the end was coming. I knew it was fake but lots of people believed and gave him their **money**. If someone tells you they know when Jesus is coming back, don't believe them because they don't know.

I believe there will be a period of great **suffering** and **worldwide tribulation** before Christ's return based on this and other passages (Rev 6:9). But I don't think as some believe that it will last **seven years** or that God will **rapture** all the Christians away before the suffering begins. I believe it's God's plan to use the sufferings of Christians to be a witness in Jesus' name during tribulation, just like the Jewish believers were witnesses in **v12-17**. *We don't know when Christ is coming back but we do know he is coming back.*¹⁰

3) How do we know it will happen?

In **New England** we know spring is coming when we begin to see the first **buds** on trees and the first little flowers coming up out of the **hard bitter** New England ground. Jesus uses the parable of the **fig tree** to say the same thing in **v29-31**. “Fig trees are bare in the winter, so the first signs of leaves are evidence that summer is near. The signs Jesus has been describing will herald the return of the Son of Man.”¹¹ He assures us it will happen and in v32-33 he reminds this generation of disciples that even some from their lifetime will be alive when Jerusalem is destroyed. If the temple is destroyed, and it has been, then we can know that **Jesus will return** in final **judgment** and **deliverance** one day.

4) How can I be ready?

This is really the most important question you can ask. Jesus **sprinkles** throughout this passage how the believers in Jerusalem could be ready for their suffering and trials and how we today can be ready for the return of Christ. I counted **seven ways** we can be ready.

1. **v8**: Watch out for false Messiahs. Don't follow them.

Don't follow religious or political Messiahs that claim to bring deliverance. They appeared for those first believers and still come at us today.

2. **v9**: Don't be afraid when you hear talk of war.

Fear is the most **powerful motivator**, but fear is **Satanic** and leads us **away from Christ**. When you feel fear, trust in Jesus. War may be the day he takes us all home.

3. **v13**: Be a bold witness for Jesus and trust the Holy Spirit.

Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about what they will say to defend themselves. He says to trust him and he will give them the right words. If he can give the right words to **Stephen in Acts 7** he can give the right words to you.

4. **v19, 28**: Stand firm, stand up, and look for Jesus in the sky because our redemption is near.

The **worse** this world gets the **more hopeful** we should become. When others **shake** we can be **confident** because we know Jesus is coming. He is going to come on “a cloud with power and great glory” (v27).

5. **v31, 33:** Trust Jesus and his words.

This world may pass away but Christ's words will never pass away. By studying this passage and the whole Bible you can build the **confidence** you'll need for the end.

6. **v34:** Don't get caught up in living life for yourself.

Jesus tells us to not get caught up in **parties** but also **anxieties**. Don't get caught up in living life for yourself, or in **worrying about yourself**. We don't need to do that because the **party is yet to come** (Rev 19:1-9).

7. **v36:** Live every day watchfully and prayerfully.

The world says to **live every day like it's your last**. The Bible says to live every day **looking forward to eternity** and the **return of Christ Jesus**. Let's go back to our last trivia question:

4. How to survive the end of the world:

A. Invest in a bunker or be the first to colonize Mars.

B. Live life to the fullest now because there's no escape.

C. *The only way to survive the end of the world is with Jesus.*

If you've never given true thought to this question, or if you pick A or B or some other answer, I want to invite you to **C—to Christ**. Jesus tells us the end will come. But it's not **annihilation** or **hopelessness** like many **end-of-the world stories** portray. It's life, **everlasting life** with Jesus. If you don't know Jesus, you can today. **Confess** your sins, put your **faith** in him, and **get ready** for his return. At the **cross** Jesus allowed his world to **end** so that you and I can **live forever** with him. *The only way to survive the end of the world is with Jesus.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church.

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² *ESV Study Bible*. Crossway Bibles. Wheaton, IL. Copyright 2008. Luke 20:5-24 footnote. Page 2002.

³ See also Matthew 24:1 and Mark 13:1.

⁴ Pastor Skip Heitzig talked about this in 42 Luke - 1995. Audible.

⁵ Wikipedia contributors. (2018, May 21). Western Stone. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 18:25, August 30, 2018, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Western_Stone&oldid=842291986

⁶ Fascinating Look at the Temple Mount's Largest Stone. Youtube. Published on October 16, 2016 by The Watchman. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R140jDNA2Q4> Accessed August 30th, 2018. Comparison provided by Yehuda Deutsch with the *Western Wall Heritage Foundation*.

⁷ Pastor Skip Heitzig talked about this in 42 Luke - 1995. Audible.

⁸ *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. Zondervan Bibles. "Josephus and the fall of Jerusalem" Mark 13. Page 1719.

⁹ See Josephus Jewish Wars 6.5.1; 7.5.3; 7.5.4; 6.9.3. <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-6.html> Accessed 8/30/18. I learned about this in the Exegetical Commentary on Luke. See Luke 21:24 comment.

¹⁰ The Romans Destroy the Temple at Jerusalem, 70 AD. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/jewishtemple.htm> Accessed 8/30/18.

¹¹ Wilkins, Michael J.. *Matthew, Mark, Luke: Volume One* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Book 1) (Kindle Locations 15067-15069). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.