

When Your World Suddenly Crumbles

Luke 21:20-38

Let's open up our Bibles again to the gospel of Luke, chapter 21. I entitled this entire series, **Glorious Disruption**, because Luke is the glorious story of Jesus and how the Son of God incredibly took on our humanity in order to rescue sinners, slaves, the outcast and the despised and make them his own. He came to disrupt a world of cold religion and hopeless sin with the life-giving message of the kingdom of God!

However, when we get to Luke 21, we realize that the glorious disruption of Christ into our lives seems sometimes incredibly "inglorious" to us. **God will disrupt our worlds in a way that we will never walk again the same way.** For the people of Israel, their absolute propensity towards idolatry and religion required the Lord to continually send them into exile and now, it seems, the great exile was about to happen. God would allow the Romans to destroy everything that they were hoping the Messiah would solidify and make sure. Their Messiah had come not to build their kingdoms but to build an everlasting Kingdom.

Isn't it true that there are moments in our lives when we feel that our dreams are shattered? Isn't it true that there are moments when we have to come to terms that things will never be quite the same as we had hoped. We wake up and the world is indelibly changed. Yesterday morning, light broke and a couple of towns in southwestern Mississippi woke up to the absolute devastation of a massive tornado having gone through the area. The people **of Rolling Fork, Mississippi had the sunrise reveal, as police constable, Jerry McCoy, put it "The Community is completely gone."** What are we meant to do with passages like this? There is no moderate language here. Jesus is speaking about the total destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem here. The decision has been made in the heavens. It's another long exile for Israel.

What are we to do when it looks like our entire world has been suddenly leveled? What do you do when your world suddenly crumbles? What do you do in that disorienting moment or season of life when you can really see how life can possibly go on? Those moments come for all of us.

My wife MariAnne was listening to a podcast the other day which she told me the speaker was saying that people's worlds have been crumbling for all of time. Since Adam and Eve fall, the story of humanity is of war after war and calamity after calamity. There is truth to that. It is true in the world today but we get lulled sometimes in our hearts that we can somehow escape the heartache and pain and problems and deep brokenness that sin has brought. We can for a bit but not for long. That desire is understandable but it is subtly or not so subtly dangerous. It breaks us away from the hope of the gospel. It draws us into seclusion or isolation from fellow sufferers. It sets us up for grave disappointments and incredibly anxieties.

This is a world where deep difficulties persist and will be as long as darkness hasn't been fully defeated. **Until Jesus comes and makes things completely new, we are going to have moments of what feels like utter devastation.** In times like this, we can often turn in one of two directions. We can turn away from God or we can turn to God. We can turn from Jesus or flee to Him alone.

This has been without a doubt the toughest two weeks of ministry at Waterbrooke as I minister in heartache and pain. I don't know if some of you are at that place in your life but when the brokenness of the world, and the fall, and the curse, place our lives in what looks like the rubble, **what do you actually do? What are you going to do when your world crumbles? Let me give you a few truths from Jesus' teaching in Luke 21.**

1. Get Your Footing. Go back to the foundation. God is God. He is on the throne. (Luke 21:20-24)

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near...For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

The doctrine of God's sovereignty is not so that you have an easy explanation for every situation. It is so that you have a solid foundation when explanations are hard to find.

The desolation isn't outside of the sovereignty of God. It's the consequence of Israel's persistent disobedience. But God isn't abandoning his plan in frustration. He actually advances His mission to the nations. **This devastation ushers in a great age of salvation for the nations.**

“During the war with Rome, many from the countryside entered the city hoping to find refuge from the invading army in this walled citadel. Jesus warns that it is no longer a place of refuge (Jer 4:6). Its doom is sealed. Walls, fortifications, and weapons are useless if God is not on their side (Jer 21:8–10; 38:2). Running for the hills is not a cowardly retreat but a deliberate break with Jerusalem and the false theology of security that views it as sacrosanct and inviolable (see Jer 51:6; Rev 18:4). “Leaving the city and its temple to their fate is recognition that Jerusalem no longer has a role to play in salvation history.”²¹ The nation, its temple, and the holy city are no longer tied to redemption. Consequently, disciples are to avoid becoming entangled in the nation's fate.” **David Garland**

The devastation isn't outside the mission of God. The promise of Abraham to be a Father of many nations is about to be fulfilled in the “times of the Gentiles”.

His kingdom cannot fail. Some things cannot be shaken.

Last week, Pastor Gabe had us read as part of our worship from Psalm 47:6,7

“God reigns over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
He is highly exalted!”

This is what Paul is arguing throughout Romans 9-11 in his call to take the gospel to the missions.

“Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” Romans 11:25

That is why we are focused so intentionally on global missions.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Colossians 3:1-2

God knows all our miseries.

God has an unfailing plan and a purpose.

This is not the end.

They meant it for evil but God intends it for good.

The Westminster Larger Catechism serves us with this brief but masterful answer to Question 54 about “his sitting at the right hand of God”:

“Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favor with God the Father, with all fullness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and doth gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces, and maketh intercession for them.”

“Seated in heaven, Jesus is not anxious or uncertain. He is not scurrying feverishly around heaven’s throne room, making last-minute rescues. He lives. He sits on heaven’s throne, secure and utterly stable, in perfect heavenly equanimity and composure, interceding for his people with, and as, God almighty by his very life and breath.” D. Mathis

“God is not only sovereign, but always good and never evil. Being the very essence of goodness Himself, it is impossible for Him to be less than He is. Through the life and work of Jesus, the sovereign God of the universe made a way for us to know His goodness experientially, and assures that He is *for* us, not against us. While Satan’s plan for our pain is to crush us with malicious intent, God’s plan for our pain is to crush evil with God-glorifying intent.” – Andrea Thom

Friends, when we are going through times that seem like utter desolation – we need to know God is working for the salvation of the nations. God is on the throne.

Get Your Footing: There is a God on the throne and our world is never out of His control.

**2. Get Your Orientation. Look to the Horizon. Lift up your heads.
Your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:25-28)**

“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:27-28

Vertigo: One of the things that happens when our worlds come tumbling down is that we find ourselves overwhelmed and disoriented. Our brother Mike Dokken battles vertigo. Spiritual vertigo is that time after a major cataclysmic event in our lives when we find ourselves getting dizzy. There are a great deal of voices telling us what we should do. We try to do something and we get turned around. I can tell people who have suffered trauma because they immediately want decisive steps because they hate the vertigo that comes with trauma. That state of waiting on God for leadership and direction is too difficult and too nauseating.

However, the truth is sometimes knowing what to do, what God wants you to do, when your world crumbles is really hard to see. God, in Israel’s history, wasn’t in a rush to resolve situations. Sometimes, God just pointed to the horizon of His plan and said, “Just when you think that it can’t get any worse, look to the horizon, your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus quotes Daniel’s vision here when He was in exile and he points out that for Daniel there was a vision of the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power. Israel’s home was in a coming Son of Man who would enter into the world with power. He would ascend to God and here in this passage, He comes down to mankind. I think we are meant to see in this passage both the ascension of Jesus and the Parousia of the second coming of Christ here.

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.” Daniel 7:13

“So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” **And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”** Acts 1:6-11

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so.

Amen. Revelation 1:7

“Jesus is coming again with power and glory, and when he comes he will bring the kingdom to consummation. The time before his coming will be frightening and chaotic. Unbelievers will be seized with fear and dread, but Jesus encourages believers to be full of hope and optimism. Jesus’ coming will be the day of our final liberation, of release from this world with all of its trouble and suffering.” David Garland

The kingdom of God is near. The best part of the story is just ahead. Soon, we will see Jesus coming on the clouds of glory. A new day is breaking. The vertigo of watching Jerusalem be destroyed, the vertigo of watching Jesus be crucified, the vertigo of having God shake everything that we believed was necessary for our identity and our stability – God removes – so we might see that only in Jesus Christ can we stand.

For them, Pentecost was about to come. For us, a new day is dawning.

These present sorrows are producing an eternal weight of glory.

When you are on a boat, they always tell you when it is rough to look out on the horizon. I remember being out on Lake Erie as a young lad in fishing tugs in storms when the waves would lift up these huge boats and you could see all the other boats with you, then you would drop into a trough and you could have thought you were utterly alone.

“If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

Hebrews 11:15-16

Sometimes when we are in the middle of devastation like Israel would be in soon, we find it hard to think straight. We cannot see how things will work out. We spend too much time considering the immediate crisis and too little time considering our ultimate destiny.

“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. **It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth “thrown in”: aim at earth and you will get neither.”** – C.S. Lewis

When you have hope, you can endure.

We have hope. Unshakeable hope in Jesus Christ.

You don’t need someone religiously lecturing us on hope. We need to hear the whispering hope of God’s saving plan and love for us in Christ.

Lancia Smith in Cultivating Project,

“How quietly hope comes to us in forms that look meek rather than bold. One of my favorite parts of the whole Narnian narrative is in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the moment when Aslan appears to Lucy not as a great Lion, but as a white pelican. When the hour is darkest and most desperate, the pelican flies by her and Lucy hears him whisper,

“Courage, dear heart.”

This single line just about sums up my entire life, and in many ways, it sums up the Christian walk. All of my courage – whatever courage I have ever had – is the cultivated product of believing that hope itself is truth-telling and despair is not. Hope is a gift, just as our faith is, and our love. These aren't qualities that we self-generate, but we can be open to having them called forth in us, as a response to a Song being sung to us beyond our ears.”

3. Wake up the Family. We need to be aware of the danger of allowing the world to slowly weigh down our hearts by its pleasures and its problems. (Luke 21:34-38)

“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:34-36)

We need to be awakened to the danger of having our hearts weighed down.

It is crucial that our church family continually recognizes the peril that surrounds them and the promises that await them if we persevere.

It is crucial that our church family continually recognizes the peril that surrounds them and the promises that await them if we persevere.

The drunken fog of worldliness - The language here of dissipation and drunkenness is the cloudy fog of a drunken hangover. Hungover, unclear, unable to think about what is really happening around us.

Go to warning passages and be warned. There are many passages.

i. Understand the Subtlety of Spiritual Fogginess!

C.S. Lewis Screwtape Letters. The senior demon Screwtape teaches his apprentice Wormwood about how to keep a Christian sliding away from God:

“As this condition becomes more fully established, you will be gradually freed from the tiresome business of providing Pleasures as temptations. As the uneasiness and his reluctance to face it cut him off more and more from all real happiness, and as habit renders the pleasures of vanity and excitement and flippancy at once less pleasant and harder to forgo (for that is what habit fortunately does to a pleasure) you will find that anything or nothing is sufficient to attract his wandering attention. You no longer need a good book, which he really likes, to keep him from his prayers or his work or his sleep; a column of advertisements in yesterday’s paper will do. You can make him waste his time not only in conversation he enjoys with people whom he likes, but in conversations with those he cares nothing about on subjects that bore him. You can make him do nothing at all for long periods. You can keep him up late at night, not roistering, but staring at a dead fire in a cold room. All the healthy and outgoing activities which we want him to avoid can be inhibited and nothing given in return, so that at last he may say, as one of my own patients said on his arrival down here, “I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked”. The Christians describe the Enemy as one “without whom Nothing is strong”. And Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why, in the

gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them, in drumming of fingers and kicking of heels, in whistling tunes that he does not like, or in the long, dim labyrinth of reveries that have not even lust or ambition to give them a relish, but which, once chance association has started them, the creature is too weak and fuddled to shake off."

"It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts,

Your affectionate uncle

SCREWTAPE"

ii. Understand The Father is Fighting for Us Not Against Us.

Hebrews 12:5-7

⁵And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons."

iii. Recognize The Family of God Fights Together to Escape the Fog of the World.

We are to help each other with this: Ephesians 5:1-20

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be

thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

iv. Watch Jesus’ Fight at Gethsemane and Know He Fights for You Still.

Hebrews 12:1-4

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”

Look at Gethsemane – Luke 22:40-46

And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. **And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."**

"Do we not perceive how intense must have been the wrestling through which he passed, and will we not hear its voice to us? 'Ye have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin.' Behold, the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession sweat even to blood rather than yield to the great tempter of your souls."

Spurgeon