

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!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ 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 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.

The other day, I was at my dad's house, and we began watching a documentary on Elvis Presley and his rise to fame; it mainly focused on the early 50s. In the 1950s, his music and the way he portrayed himself on stage were considered so offensive that no one would show him on television below the waist, shaking his leg, for fear of “corrupting the children.”

I told my dad, “this is the classic example; people are afraid of change.” We like to keep things at the status quo. As I began to think about today's scripture passage, Jesus is also Speaking of change. A lot of commentaries I've read, and sermons I've heard, go to the eschatological end of the spectrum when commenting on Luke 21:5-19, but I do not want to talk about the end times. I wish to speak about something a little more urgent. Now let me preface it by saying the eschaton, the end of time, is important; however, I want you to keep in mind that faith is not a destination but a journey. What Jesus is talking about in our lesson today is change. The destruction of the temple and what that will mean for the Jewish people and the followers of Christ.

So, I am, working on this sermon, and I can't help but think about the People Jesus was speaking to that day. Oh, the questions they must have had. Have you ever had a conversation with someone, a teacher, a mentor, or a friend that you know might understand the topic a little better than you, and they say

something so profound that it throws your entire understanding of the subject into flux? You think, “who, what, why, when”? Because you can’t comprehend the impact of what they just said.

Jesus told those listening to him that the temple would be destroyed. We know from history that this prediction comes true in 70 CE, about 30 years after these events. But can’t you imagine the people looking at the Temple’s grandeur and magnificence thinking, “but this is the city of David, where God resides; how can this be?” How soon do people forget that this is the 2nd temple? God has already allowed this to happen before.

So, the prediction that Jesus made, the temple being destroyed, rocks their understanding of the world, not just their religion. What Jesus is talking about is a change in their cosmological understanding. Because the temple was the center of the Jewish faith. Everything important in their faith happened in the temple; it housed the ark of the covenant, Aaron's staff, it's where all the sacrifices took place, it's where the priests resided, it's where you took your child to have them dedicated eight days after they were born, **it was everything; the center of the religion.**

In 70 CE, when the temple was destroyed, Rome ransacked Jerusalem, leaving nothing but the outline of where the temple stood. Judaism changed forever. The Judaism we know today, rabbinic Judaism, is much different from second-temple Judaism. With the temple gone, no one made sacrifices. There was no central location; the rabbis spread out to synagogues, and Judaism changed forever.

So, this led me to think about how in the 1950s, music changed; rock and roll pushed swing music and big band music to the side; its heyday was coming to an end. The children of that day danced a little looser and sang a little louder and with more soul, and their parents were scared to death. Change is something that we always fear. Change is something we can't help but fear. But think about this: without the temple’s destruction, God's plan to spread the message of Jesus across the world may have never happened. Christianity may have remained a backward religion in a little section of Galilee where they talked about this itinerant preacher who claimed that God loves us all and will forgive us of our sins.

As providence would have it, I got this e-mail from the American Library Association’s e-mail list. The article they sent me was the top 100 most banned and challenged books from 2010 to 2019. Now,

unless you've lived under a rock for the past several years, you should know that many school boards and town council oversight committees have put forward all these books they want to be banned from school and public libraries. So, curiosity got the best of me, and I began to read the article to see the different books on there and if there were any that I had read. Or maybe we all need to read.

As I looked at the e-mail article, the 2nd book on the list was the ***Captain Underpants series by Dave Pilkey***, which blew my mind. The grandparents in this room may not know this book series, but it's a children's book about two kids in the fourth grade who draw a superhero named Captain Underpants based on their elementary school principal. My son is 18 years old and owns every book in the series. I think he read them all growing up multiple times. The only thing that book did was fed a young boy's imagination and help him think outside the box. It did not warp his sense of reality or corrupt him morally; he graduated high school two years early with honors and was a straight-A student. He got offers to go to every college he applied to and a few he didn't, and he could hold his own in a theological discussion.

So, I wondered why they put that book on there. Other books on the list were, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (wow); that one was interesting. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *A Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, Further down the list, *The Adventures of Super Diaper Baby* by Dave Pilkey (a spin-off of his other books), *Goosebumps* by RL Stein, *Catcher in the Rye* by JD Salinger, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and then I got to number 52 on the list, *The Holy Bible*. And I immediately asked, (Who, What, Why, When?)

One of the most requested books to be banned between 2010 and 2019; is not some book that instructs kids on how to be deviants, not some book that shows someone how to build a bomb but a gospel that tells us that God walked on this earth in the form of a human and that God loved us so much that God died for our sins. **Unbelievable!**

Jesus tells those that listen that day, "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified." When I hear that the Bible is being banned from public libraries; that scares me.

Let's do a little thought experiment. I want you to take a moment. Think about every book you may have read or every conversation about a book you may have. Be it by Shakespeare, Hemmingway, Mark Twain,

Harper Lee, the guy that wrote Captain Underpants, or a harlequin novel. When I think about those writers and those books, I have never heard anyone say, "I read Macbeth, and it changed my life."

However, I have spoken to many people that have read the story of Jesus, and it changed their lives forever. The great philosopher **Heraclitus** is quoted saying, "**change is the only constant in life.**" When we fear change, we try to ban the things that cause it, be it rock'n'roll music, books that inspire and inform our children, and in some cases, even the Bible.

Today I'm here to tell you some good news; change is not bad!

You see, before Jesus, when the temple stood tall, and Jerusalem was a proud nation, before Herod's temple, before Solomon's temple, all the way back to when David was king, and before David when the nation of Israel lived under judges all the way back to Moses.

Our only Hope of salvation was following the LAW. A law that had been so convoluted by humanity that no one could differentiate between what was God's intention and what was man's law. But because Jesus walked this earth and died and was buried and three days later got up and walked out of that tomb, the entire universe changed, and it scared the hell out of those who didn't believe. If you don't believe me, read the Book of Acts and what Paul did before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

To be afraid of change for the sake of change is something we **must not be "OK" with**. Every generation says the new generation is doomed to hell because they didn't do it "as we did." I have looked at my son and said, "I wouldn't do it like that," my parents looked at me and said, "they wouldn't do it as I did it," and their parents looked at them and said, "they wouldn't do it the way they did it," every new generation is change. One study shows that the Gen Z generation, those born between 1997 and 2012, are less likely to drink alcohol or have pre-marital sex.

Jesus tells us that change is inevitable. But with change comes opportunity. What does he say to his listeners? That when change comes, it will be easy! NO! IT WILL BE HARD! It will be difficult.¹³ 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. No one here this morning is in any danger of persecution. Now arrest is another story; what you did last night is your business. However, Jesus also told them that¹⁵, "...I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict."

I first heard the words and wisdom of Jesus from my grandmother. But for many people, it's picking up a Bible. What are people to do if they can't pick up a bible because a municipality has banned it from the local library? Nothing can change a person, a family, or a community faster and more for the better than the Gospel of Jesus. Change is inevitable; Change is hard. But change can also be the best thing in the world.

We should not put faith in this world, nor should we put the fear of change in our hearts because we have a foundation in Jesus and security found in God through the Holy Spirit that surrounds us that never changes. The Bible says, Isaiah 43:18-19, ¹⁸ "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. ¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? And Numbers 23:19, "God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" God is forever, unlike a temple. Malachi 3:6 says, "I the LORD do not change," Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." So, this morning I ask you to think about this. When we fear change, is it because we rest our faith in God or in the things of this world? I hope your faith journey is anchored in the right place... Let us pray.