

St. Peter Lutheran Church
November 16, 2025
Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 21:5-36

Jesus speaks of terrible destruction to come. The speech kicks off as **some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations.** Jesus' response is that these things that they see now will soon be destroyed—not a stone will be left upon another that it not thrown down.

Yes, judgment would come swiftly upon Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her. Their sins up until this point would be nothing compared to what would occur when Jesus, the Lord of life, would be hung on a cross to die. Jesus, their Messiah and King, crucified by their hands. The blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world would be required of that generation. A conflict would come soon upon her that would leave the temple of Jerusalem demolished. This would occur in the Jewish revolt against the Romans in the year of our Lord 70. The Romans would come down hard on the Jews, destroy their place, and disperse their people. This would be a terrible time, a time of curse, a time of utter destruction.

His disciples ask him when these things will be and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place. Jesus's answer sounds like the apocalypse. It's a mini book of Revelation right here in the Gospel. False Christs vying for worship. Wars, conflicts, bloodshed. But this is not yet the end. Natural disasters—earthquakes, famines, pestilences. Even fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

But this was not the worst of the signs for those closest to Jesus. Before these things took place, those closest to Jesus, especially the apostles of His Gospel, were promised that they would be handed over as Jesus himself was handed over. They would be persecuted, delivered to synagogues and prisons, brought before kings and rulers for Christ's name's sake. Those who confess Christ to the world would be given the supreme opportunity to do so—to be persecuted for bearing the name of Jesus to the world. Some of them would even be counted worthy to fill up Christ's suffering even to the point of death. Some would be granted the privilege not only of the world's scorn toward Christ falling on them, but of those closest to them betraying them and handing them over to death. And by their death, they would continue, indeed complete, their witness of Jesus Christ.

And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, our victory has been won; the kingdom ours remaineth. Jesus promises his disciples who will suffer for his sake that not a hair of their head shall be lost no matter what befalls them. By their patience in their suffering, they will possess their souls. Though they die, yet will they live.

Jerusalem's fate was not good. Judgment was coming upon her. When the Roman armies surround her, Jesus says that those in Judea should flee to the mountains, those within the city should depart, and no one should enter her. These will be days of vengeance. As the Lord, whom the city rejected says, "Vengeance is mine, and recompense." The Lord's vengeance was coming upon Jerusalem.

So he says, **"Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."**

Jesus came to his own and his own rejected him. So their place is taken from them. Not only their place, but even the kingdom itself is given to others—to Gentiles, to all who will receive him. St. Paul speaks of the transfer of the kingdom as the natural branches being broken off and wild branches being grafted in. The disobedience of Israel allowed for mercy to extend to the Gentiles. But Paul reminds us that this is not the end of it—the point is that mercy extends to all. He writes, **For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.** Christ's redemption is universal and his reign is universal. All nations will stream into Zion.

Even as Jerusalem falls, it is for the building of the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, from all nations and tribes. The destruction of Jerusalem is not yet the end, but a picture of it. Though the temple falls in 70 and the people fall by the edge of the sword and are led away captive, the world carries on, even to today. God didn't bring a total end or a complete destruction yet. This is for the purpose of bringing in the great harvest from the nations as the Gospel goes forth to the ends of the world. God is patient, not desiring any to perish, but that all would reach repentance. There is a full number to be gathered in, and God's long-suffering will continue until the great army of God is complete.

But then, the End will come. **There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.**

The destruction of Jerusalem, as horrible as that was, will look like child's play when God's vengeance comes upon the entire world. But Jesus tells his disciples that the day of thick darkness and gloom, the day of vengeance that is coming on the whole world, this Day will be the day of their redemption. This is because they belong to Him, the One upon whom judgment has already fallen at the horror of His cross. He bore the wrath of God for our sins so that God's favor would rest on all who find refuge in Him.

Then he spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will be no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will be no means pass away.”

So that generation did see these things—they were persecuted for Jesus’ sake, many lived to see Jerusalem fall and the temple destroyed, but even before all that, that generation saw all things fulfilled in the death and the resurrection of Jesus. The heavenly signs of the end happened then. The sun lost its light and there was darkness over the land as Jesus hung on the cross. At his death, there were great earthquakes and rocks were split. Even many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. The End came already in Jesus Christ. Judgment Day happened for the sins of the world in Jesus’ death. And by his resurrection, the new creation began. The age to come and the resurrection of the dead came already in Christ. All things took place in that generation. Even the end of the world and the dawn of new creation.

So what remains for us, after all things have been fulfilled in Christ? Watching and waiting. For the day comes soon when Christ will return to bring what is fulfilled in Him to its completion for the entire creation. The heavens will shake, the sun will fail to give its light, the stars will fall, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll and the heavenly bodies dissolved in fire. And God will make all things new. Creation will catch up to Jesus.

So these words of Jesus are for us today: **But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.**

On that Last Day, we all will appear before Christ the Righteous Judge. Some will enter into eternal life, some into everlasting punishment. This day will catch many unaware, unprepared, and unable to enter eternal life. Many even who had started in the faith will be found to have made a shipwreck of it, having their faith choked out by the cares of this life. **Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass.** The Christian who waits and remains prepared for the Lord is vigilant, sober-minded, always setting his mind on things that are above and on the kingdom of heaven. He is praying always. These Christians are found here, gathered before Christ in His Word and Sacrament, receiving His teaching and His gifts now, offering their prayers and thanksgivings, and saying, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Abiding in His Word, meeting together before Him regularly, Christ cares for us now so that we will be able to stand when He comes in glory. Through His care in the Church, our faith is preserved, Christ’s righteousness is ours, our sins are forgiven, and we are prepared for His coming.

We are quickly approaching another Church Year, and Christ has not yet returned. The temptation is always to occupy ourselves with things seemingly more pressing than waiting for Jesus' return. As another year begins, may God increase in each of us and in our congregation a zeal for watching and praying. Come to church—hold the Word of God sacred and gladly hear and learn it. God cares for your soul here through the means of grace, keeping you in the true faith. We need His care. For even if Christ doesn't return in our lifetime, our life will come to an end, and then the judgment. Watch therefore, and pray, and God will keep you ready to stand before the Son of Man.