

## First the Bad News...

Luke 21:5-19

An art gallery owner calls up an artist and says, "I have some good news and some bad news." The artist asks, "What's the good news?"

Gallery owner says, "The good news is that a woman came in here today asking if the price of your paintings would go up after you die. When I told her they would, she bought every one of your paintings."

Artist says, "That's great! What's the bad news?" Gallery owner says, "The bad news is that woman was your doctor!"

In our Bible passage today, Jesus had to deliver some bad news to his disciples, and he started with the bad news.

Jesus and his disciples are standing in the Temple courts, and his disciples couldn't help but remark on the beauty of this place. Understand that the Temple courts sat on 36 acres of land. The giant stones that made up the Temple were dazzling, blinding white marble, and over some of the stones was gold plating that reflected the sunlight.

From a distance, the whole complex must have looked like a glowing jewel. Up close, it probably seemed like the most impressive building in the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> In the shadows of this grand Temple, Jesus tells his disciples that this magnificent center of Jewish life and faith was destined for destruction.

And not only that, Jesus told his followers that they would experience persecution and violence because of their commitment to him. Life as they knew it was going to fall apart.

In verse 6, Jesus says, "As for what you see here..." Those are powerful words. It's so easy to put our faith ... to anchor our hope ... in things we can touch and see in this world. It's so easy to be impressed by appearances ... and possessions ... and symbols of security ... even though some of these symbols are superficial and, in some cases, not even real.

**Jesus knew that fear that motivates us to put our trust in things we can touch, things we can see, things we can own.** It is fear that motivates us to put our trust in worldly power and physical possessions. We find security and significance in our homes, our church buildings, our appearance, our possessions.

And worry leads us into chasing after any false prophet or guru who promises us security and significance. Every year, hundreds of runners from all over the world compete in the Boston Marathon. Blue lines are painted on the pavement throughout the course to show runners where the turns are.

One year, on the night before the race, a prankster painted some other blue lines, which would have led the runners into a dead end. Fortunately, the deception was discovered just before the race began, and the event was run on schedule.

Like runners following the wrong path to the finish line, Jesus knew that some of his followers could stray from their faith under the pressure of persecution and suffering because fear and worry lead to an increased desire to control our lives. And an increased desire to control our lives causes us to focus inwardly and become even more fearful and anxious.

**The solution to fear is to trust God’s plan no matter what the future holds.**

Jesus said just that in verse 14: “But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves.” Interesting. “Make up your mind not to worry beforehand...”

Bishop Fulton Sheen once said, “All worry is atheism, because it is a want of trust in God.”<sup>ii</sup>

Why is worry a form of atheism? Because it stems from a focus on earthly things, on security, on self-protection. Worry is rooted in a self-centered life.

From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he cast visions of a heavenly kingdom in which all people from all nations would find identity and security. The people of his day took their identity and security from a magnificent Temple. Jesus took his teachings outside the Temple, into the streets and into the fields where the average Josephs were just scraping by.

He took his message to the lepers and the women, to the Samaritans and the tax collectors. In John, chapter 4, he shared a secret with a despised Samaritan woman, telling her that worship is no longer confined to the Temple. He said “a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

In our lesson today, Jesus reminds us that all earthly things that we put our trust in will one day be destroyed. The kingdom of God is not something we can touch or see. It is the Spirit of God working in human hearts to bring about holiness and justice, righteousness and peace until the day that Jesus comes again. And before the Spirit of God can come alive in our heart, we have to die to ourselves.

Hudson Taylor was a British missionary to China and founder of one of the most effective missionary organizations in the world. On the matter of fear and worry for the future, he once said, “Let us give up our work, our thoughts, our plans, ourselves, our lives, our loved ones, our influence, our all, right into His hand; and then, when we have given all over to Him, there will be nothing left for us to be troubled about, or to make trouble about.”<sup>iii</sup>

We are deceived if we place our trust in earthly kingdoms and temples built by human hands. Jesus told his disciples that the majestic Temple would be torn down. Their fellow Jews, their loved ones, all those people that they trusted would turn against them and persecute them for their faith in him.

Every earthly kingdom, every tangible thing in which they put their trust had to be torn away in order for them to know that the kingdom of God is the only sure foundation for their life—for it is eternal and it will never fail.

When we’re surrounded by hard times and persecution, when all that’s tangible in our lives is falling apart, **Jesus tells us to see our suffering as an opportunity to witness to God’s truth.**

How would it change your life if you looked at every setback, failure, loss or heartbreak as an opportunity to witness to God’s goodness and faithfulness? More importantly, how would it change the lives of those around you if you turned your suffering into an opportunity to witness for God’s glory?

Jesus promises in this passage that God is already prepared to defend those who believe in Him. He will give us the words to share our faith with conviction. Not a hair on our head will perish, if we stand firm. It’s a promise from an eternal and faithful God, and we can bet our whole lives on it without fear, without failure, without regret.

Diet Eman and her boyfriend, Hein, were Dutch Christians who hid Jewish citizens from the Nazis in World War II. They knew they were risking their lives, but their faith in Jesus compelled them to protect innocent Jews from persecution. In 1944, Hein was arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp.

Diet was arrested soon after and sent to a different camp. Although she suffered greatly in the camp, she continued to trust in God's promises of protection. She even took a hair pin and scratched Jesus' promise from Matthew 28 on the prison wall, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end".

Diet was eventually released, but Hein died in Dachau. Fellow prisoners reported that Hein radiated the love of Christ in the concentration camp, and before his death, he wrote a final note to Diet. It read, "Darling, don't count on our seeing each other again soon ... Here we see again that we do not decide our own lives... Even if we won't see each other again on earth, we will never be sorry for what we did, that we took this stand. And know, Diet, that of every last human being in this world, I loved you most."<sup>iv</sup>

Think about that. "Here we see again that we do not decide our own lives ... Even if we won't see each other again on earth, we will never be sorry for what we did, that we took this stand."

We don't decide our own lives. And sometimes that is bad news ... Jesus knew that this truth could cause his followers great fear and anxiety. It could lead them to following false gods and straying from the truth.

But he also knew that it could lead them to decide beforehand to trust God—to see any suffering that came into their lives as an opportunity for sharing God's faithfulness. Which ultimately leads to Good News—the greatest good news imaginable that we really are not in control of our lives and our destinies, but a loving God is in control and every good thing in our life that we have lost will be restored. And we will live life more fully and more wondrously than we have ever imagined.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-21/>

<sup>ii</sup> Zig Ziglar, *Better Than Good* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006), p. 33.

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.azquotes.com/author/17456-Hudson\\_Taylor](https://www.azquotes.com/author/17456-Hudson_Taylor)

<sup>iv</sup> Cited in Max Lucado, *Unshakable Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018).