

## 2012-12-30 sermon: Stand (Luke 21)

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As we closed the year out, we saw that there were many things which caused people to be worried, caused them to have trouble within their hearts. As you heard, within our own church family, we had this mom who had been carrying this baby and she had passed away. I praise God that she is now in a much better place. She hurt any kind of pain that she may have had after that accident is now over and now she's with our Lord Jesus Christ. Or as Pastor Derek had mentioned, shooting in Newtown as well. It unnerves you, it makes you concerned.

And then also as well, we had youth group at our house just past Friday. And I wasn't sure how many people were going to come, we thought maybe a hundred or so. But it turned out only to be sixty. And one of the things that we want to do is reflect on 2012 and look forward to 2013. With the mindset very similar to the Mayan prediction, the end of the world. But meaning the end of chasing after this world and chasing after God's kingdom instead. So even though there are things which worry us, which cause us to be concerned, we need God's help instead to focus on His things and His plan because He has a good and perfect purpose for our lives.

So if you can, if you can turn off me to Luke chapter 21, Christ realizes that people are troubled. He realizes that with the future uncertain, people may worry. So Christ, He addresses that. He wants people to sense comfort. He wants them to understand what peace is. He wants them to experience His good and perfect will. If you can turn off me to Luke chapter 21, Luke chapter 21. We're going to be going through the whole chapter, it'll be verses 1 through 38.

And the way it's going to be broken down, if you guys like to take notes, is that first we're going to look at our wallet in verses 1 through 4, our watch in verses 5 through 8, and lastly our walk through the remainder of the chapter verses 9 through 38. But before we go on any longer, I desperately need to pray and I'm going to ask for God's spirit to kind of speak because I got nothing. It's all of Him.

Dear God, we pray that Your Spirit move in a mighty way and follow. I pray that You may help Your Word to go out and do amazing things, follow, because I know it's not about me this very morning. I just feel really tired. I feel this code is going to be kicking in really hard. But, follow, Your Word, nothing shall overcome that. It doesn't become weak. It never fades and it's shine and it's power. So I pray, follow, that Your Word may go out and bring life to Your people. Give them hope, follow. There are things in this world which trouble us, whether it be people losing jobs, whether people be losing their health, losing a family member or hearing of little children. We just went to school one day and then lost our lives. Follow, there are troubling times we live in, but You are our rock. You are our hope. You are our salvation. And because of You, we can move forward. And not only move forward, but we can have incredible hope because we know

that You have a future for us planned out. In Your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Luke chapter 21 verses 1 through 4. As Jesus looked up, He saw the rich putting their gifts into the temporal treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. I tell you the truth, He said, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.

In the previous chapters, many people have been asking Jesus questions, and now His disciples were going to be asking Him questions in this chapter. And these questions had to do with how the world was going to end. And everyone in this world believes that this world is going to end. You don't have to be a believer in Christ to realize that this world is going to come to a close. Because if you just look at Hollywood, and much of Hollywood is coming from a very unchristian point of view, they're fascinated with how this world is going to end. And then when we see that disasters happening all around us, we realize the brevity of life. And His disciples were going to ask Jesus, how will we know that the end of the world is to come?

So then Christ gives them some comforting answers. But before that, we hear this story about this widow. And a couple of notes about this is that Jesus says that she gave more than all the others combined. That even though with trouble coming, she still gave more. Because as the Scripture says, she gave all that she had to live on. It was an incredible trust. Even with the future being uncertain, she moved forward in faith. And what an example for us.

Her might that she gave was not the very least that she could give, but it's the very most. And for us, many times we think, what's the very least that we can do? If it's to get a good grade in school, what's the least amount of time we can spend studying? Or to get a promotion, what's the least amount of time that we could put into that effort at work? But when it comes to God's kingdom, we have to change our mindset, because His kingdom will last forever. So the question is not what's the least that could be given, but what's the most that could be given?

When she gave her present, gave her offering, God saw more than just a portion that she gave. He also saw the proportion that she gave. And for us, many of us, what we give, it may seem like a lot compared to the world's standards. But God also sees what we have left over as well. Men see what is given, but God sees what is left. And by that, He measures the gift as well as the condition of our hearts. If God is the love of our lives, then we will get our wallet in line as well with the things that He loves. Winston Churchill once said, we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. So for us, the question is, what can we give unto the Lord this coming year? Could it be an opportunity to go down to feed my starving children and being able to help children live instead of perishing from hunger? Or could it be going on a mission trip, sending aside a certain amount of money to be able to go to Burundi, or go to Cambodia, or go to Nepal, to be able to reach people with the gospel? And not only just the money factor, but also the vacation time as well. Vacationing so that God's kingdom may be expanded.

We have to understand the context of this. She was a poor widow, but she was sent against a

backdrop of a beautiful temple. If you can imagine the most beautiful building that you have ever walked into. It could be one of those fantastic-looking casinos in Las Vegas where everything is painted gold or it's sparkling or shiny. The temple was very similar to that. It was a beautiful structure and it had many costly decorations laid all across it. And this poor widow never could have given anything that compared to that. And the disciples mentioned this to Jesus, but our Lord was not impressed by the building. He was more impressed by her heart. He told them that the day would come when that beautiful temple would be demolished. And then what of its beauty? It would become the supple of a rubble. He had already announced that the city would be destroyed in chapter 19, but now he specifically mentioned the destruction of this temple.

And then he left the temple and went to the Mount of Olives, and there are three disciples. Peter, James, and John, they asked him three questions. We see it in verse number seven, but let's read verses five and six before we get there. Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple is adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 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. The teacher, they said, when all these things happen, when will all these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place? And then he gives his reply in the following verses.

The questions that they're asking is, when will this temple be destroyed? When will be the sign of his coming, of Christ's coming? And what will be the sign of the end of the age? At that time, the disciples thought that these three events would occur at the same time. But Jesus explained things differently. He explained a progression of events. He just kind of lopped them together. But there's actually a huge gap between some of these events taking place. The temple would be first destroyed, and that would happen in 70 AD, about 40 years after that this discussion was taking place. And then there'd be a long period of time before Christ would return and establish his kingdom on earth.

Something to keep in mind while we're looking through this passage, as well as looking through any passage, is we have to keep in mind who is talking and who is listening. Now, who is the address being given to? And Jesus, he was born a Jew, and his message was given to his Jewish disciples. And it was talking about the future of the Jewish nation. With that in mind, it shed some light on this passage, because this passage has been misinterpreted many times.

There are applications for God's people today, but the emphasis was on Jerusalem, the Jews, and the temple. Our Lord was not discussing his coming for the church, for that would occur at any time, and there was no sign needed to precede it. But the Jews required a sign. For the church, instead, we look for the Savior.

So Christ gives this message, and it focuses on a period in God's program called the Tribulation when God would pour out his wrath on the nations of the world. Many Bible students believe that the Tribulation will begin after the Lord comes in the air and takes the church to be with him in heaven forever. It will climax with the return of Christ to the earth, at which time he will defeat

his foes and establish his kingdom. We read that within the book of Revelation.

Should I move this way, or should I move that? I don't know. I'll move this a little further. Just be on the same side. Alright. Okay. I'm trying not to move here. The first half of the Tribulation, we see that outlined here in this chapter, verses 8 through 19. Then we see the last half of the Tribulation in verses 25 through 27. Christ gives some encouraging words in verses 28 through 36. So without further ado, let us move into the Scripture.

First, we talked about our wallet in verses 1 through 4. Now we're talking about our watch in verses 5 through 28. The first thing we're going to look at is the signs that are reviewed in verses 5 through 19, how the temple is raised (R-A-Z-E-D) in verses 20 through 24, and then the Lord's return in verses 25 through 28.

Christ talks about the signs which are reviewed. We started already, and we'll just pick it up in verse number 8. He replied, "Watch out that you are not deceived, for many will come in my name claiming, 'I am he,' and 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

The characteristics that Jesus stated can be seen in every age of the church. There have been false teachers coming about saying that they are Christ or the second coming of Christ. He tells his people not to be concerned about that because it happens in every age of the church. From the beginning, there have been counterfeit messiahs, international upheavals, and religious persecutions. These things will increase and intensify as the time of Jesus' coming draws near.

I don't know if you guys have noticed, but it's just been becoming a crazier and crazier world as time has passed by. I don't remember a time when there's been so many natural disasters and outbursts of violence as what's been taking place. It's crazy. And then there are rumors of wars coming as well. There's trouble brewing within the Middle East, but not only within the Middle East, but there's also trouble within the northern part of Africa and other parts of the world. It's something to consider. Coming events, even before they come, they'll cast a shadow before they come into fruition. I believe that's what's taking place now. We're seeing shadows of the coming end time.

There will also be a delusion as well. We read this in verse number eight. Even God's people will be in danger of being deceived. The same is known as the deceiver. For centuries, he's led people astray by deceiving their minds and binding their hearts as well. Israel is often seduced into sin by false prophets, and the church has had its share of false teachers. Not everyone who comes knocking at your door saying they'd like to have a Bible study with you is a follower of Jesus Christ. You have to be wary of who you sit down with and have a discussion about Christ. Most people are naturally concerned about the future. For everyone within this room, I believe we're concerned about what's coming in the coming year, 2013. But Christ tells his people, do not be deceived, do not be concerned. We must take that to heart.

The only sure way to keep us from being deceived is like what Pastor Derek has said: be into the Word. As you know the Scripture and obey what God tells you to do, your life will be blessed by God. You'll be able to discern right teaching from God's Word from improper teaching from God's Word. For any teacher or person who preaches, don't take what we say; look into it for yourselves. See if what we're saying is right. If it's not right, you have to come and tell us that it's not right because we could be off as well. So examine the Word.

Verses 9 through 11 say, "When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, and the end will not come right away. Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.'" There is international distress around the world. Jesus said that from 2,000 years ago, and even today it is still taking place. But it's happening much more frequently. During the first half of the Tribulation, these events will multiply and intensify. If you look through Matthew chapter 24 and the book of Revelation, you'll see it's much more in detail. That could be for another day or another Sunday school. But if you look more intensely into it, you will see that these things have been forecast. These things will come to pass. It's just a question of when.

Jesus's admonition to his people is, "Do not be terrified. These things must come to pass. There will be nothing anyone can do to prevent them." This does not mean that God's people are submitting to blind faith, that we're not lemmings just going over a cliff. He tells us so that we can be aware of what's coming to pass. God is our loving Father, and he works all things for his good and for the good of his people.

There will also be religious persecution. We read that in verses 12 through 15: "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons. Synagogues during the time were places where prisoners were held as well as where public meetings and trials would take place. And you will be brought before kings and governors on account of my name. This will result in you being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves, for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends. The people that we hold closest to us. They will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me, but not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm, you will gain life."

For me, this is such an encouragement as a balding man, realizing that not a hair of my head will perish unless God allows it. I guess I'm the only balding man within this room. Jesus promised that people would suffer, and that holds true for today as well. The persecution in the end times will be much more severe. It will be so incredibly violent that even if you bring up the name of Christ or talk about what is said within his word, there will be a violent reaction against you. You will be called haters of certain groups of people who are living an ungodly lifestyle, which the world lifts up and says is normal. But for us as believers in Christ, we must stand firm.

Do not be troubled, but continue holding up what God has said, even to the point when people will be giving their lives for Christ.

Notice the encouragement that Christ gives to all those who suffer persecution. We will be suffering for his name. If we'd suffer for our own name, many of us would eat humble pie, and we would apologize. But for the sake of Christ, we must go on living for him. The moment we turn away from Christ, we compromise with the world. Instead of being a citizen of heaven, we become a bond slave of Satan. So we must stand firm to the end. It is important that the name of Christ be glorified.

Times of suffering provide opportunities for a witness. Even though we don't understand why the mother of that baby died, we can come alongside that family and put our arms around them. Even though we don't always understand God's perfect plan, we can give them the comfort and say, "Even though I don't understand, I know that God is here right now with us, giving us comfort." The apostles, as we read in the book of Acts, made good use of the witness stand whenever they were arrested and taken before councils, governors, or Caesar. They were constantly a witness for Jesus Christ. Christ's servants and martyrs down through the centuries have followed their example. The English word "martyr" comes from the Greek word "martus," which means a witness. Because of official persecution, God's witnesses will stand before important people, and when this happens, we must not panic. God will give us the words to speak.

Whenever I'm standing in a situation where a person is very angrily coming against me because I'm a follower of Christ, I just stop and pray in my mind, saying, "God, help me to be your son, Jesus, to this person." If you've never come to that point, I encourage you to be mindful of being a witness for Christ. Not only will saints endure official persecution from the government, but also opposition from family and friends. Your family members may become like Judas and betray you. But do not despair, for God is in control.

Like what I mentioned earlier, not a hair of your head can perish apart from the sovereign will of God. With that understanding, we will endure in our faith, and we will have courage. We must remember that Christ described not the signs of his soon return, because these things have been going on for centuries. However, as the time of Christ draws near, these things will multiply and intensify. No matter what our views may be about the coming of our Lord, we need to remember, do not be deceived, do not be afraid, and do not worry.

And then we next see the temple is destroyed in verses 20 through 24. When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers. There will be great distress in the land and wrath against these people. They will fall by a sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the

times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

During those times when nations were being invaded, people from the countryside would head into the next closest city because it had fortified walls, it had defenses against invaders. But he was telling them, do not head to Jerusalem because Jerusalem's fate has been sealed. Every stone will be thrown off of each other, it will become a pile, a heap of ruins. So instead run away from Jerusalem, but during that time that went against the common practice when an invader would come, you'd head to the closest city.

Christ is reminding them that this is the destruction of the Jewish temple. A great tribulation was about to fall to the Jews, and this took place in the year 70. This terrible event was a dress rehearsal for what would happen later on when we read in the book Revelation when all of the world will be thrown into tribulation. Jewish historian Josephus during that time records that up to a million Jews were killed by the Romans and 100,000 were taken captive. When Titus, the Caesar at that time, took the city, the emperor at that time took the city. It was an incredible time of anguish for the Jews as their temple was taken down, as their city was destroyed.

But believers today who are looking for their Lord's return, we don't have to think of this as applying to us. Because Jesus was talking about Jerusalem as he says very specifically, it was the city of Jerusalem as well as the temple. Our Lord's coming for the church, as it says in 1 Corinthians, will come in the twinkling of an eye. We will have no time to go back home to get a coat. We will have no time to worry about traveling on a Sabbath or caring for nursing babies. We'll be taken up like that. And what a glorious time that will be.

And next he talks about his return. We read that in verses 25 through 28. There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. Under earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world. For the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At the time they will see the Son of Man coming in the cloud with power and great glory. And what an incredible sight that will be. When do things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near.

This is a beautiful picture of what's going to be taking place within the book of Revelation in the latter half of it. It describes the frightening judgment sign that God was sent on the earth during the last half of the tribulation. We read that the sun and the moon will be dark and the stars will fall. And this is the sign of Christ's return. And the reason we know that the fall of Jerusalem, that it was a separate time, is because that did not take place during that time. This is going to be a yet, a future event that is yet to come. These awesome signs will bring terror to the lost people of the world, but hope to those who have trusted the Lord during the tribulation period. For these believers know that the Lord is coming, will be soon.

Believers today look for the Savior. We don't look for signs because we know he'll come just like that. But the end times are casting a shadow as we see it in the violence, outbreaking just in random places and natural disasters taking, as well as the hardening of people's hearts towards

the gospel. Christ appearing will be sudden, glorious, and with fantastic power. And those who ignore the doctrine of the return of Christ, they will see that it is but true. We don't blame them for ignoring this, the teaching of the gospel of the return of Christ, because for 2,000 years believers have been holding on to hope, and he has not returned yet. But we know that God's time is different than man's time, and he will come. And people will have to turn from their wicked ways to Christ during that time.

And then we read next in verses 29-38. We must be careful of our walk. We must be careful and be watchful. We read in verse 29. He told us this parable, look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that the summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap, for it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch and pray that you may be able to escape all that's about to happen, that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. And we see the two admonitions in verse 34. Be careful, and then in verse 36, be always on the watch. Each day, Jesus was teaching at a temple, and each evening he went out to spend a night on the hill called the Mount of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

In the Bible, the fig tree is often an image of Israel. And we will see that it will sprout leaves. It is, in other words, the time of harvest is going to be coming about. But it's not just a nation of Israel, as it says. It says, look at the fig tree and all the trees. Not only will that take place within a nation of Israel, but all the nations around the world as well. Because it's a picture of not just one nation, but many nations. We must know what is going on, as the budding of the trees indicate that summer is near. So the occurring of these signs indicate that the Lord's return is near as well. The important thing is that the believers know that God is keeping his promises and that his word will never fail.

Even if we go through the worst of times, we must realize that God has a good purpose for us. Now this is the troubling verse in verse number 32. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. One interpretation of this verse is that this prophetic event took place in year 8070. And part of it did with the destruction of Jerusalem as well as the temple. But we see other parts of this prophecy have not taken place yet as well. Which means the sun and the moon and the stars as well as the destruction of much of this world. So that is still yet to come.

One possible interpretation of this passage, of this verse, is that when these signs begin to take place, that generation, when these are taking place in great intensity and coming very quickly, that generation will not pass away. It will take place within that generation. Jesus was assuring



the disciples that in spite of all the difficulties Israel would endure, the nation will be protected by God and not be destroyed. Satan has wanted to destroy the nation, Israel, but he will not succeed.

Christ tells us to be careful, like he said in verse number 34, and also to be watchful in verse number 36. We must be aware of the times that we live in, and we must watch for the Lord's coming. I'll know about you, but with the things that are going on in this world, it does make me feel sad, but it also gives me hope. I know that God's word is true. He will come for us, but before that good coming takes place, it's going to get a little bit worse. And even though this world is terrifying at times, I know God is faithful, and he will come for us. We must be careful and watch for his coming.

Let's pray. Dear God, I do thank you so much for this time we could spend and look into your word. And I pray, Father, that you may give comfort to your people. It is truly disconcerting some of the things which are happening in this world around us. But, Father, it's not something we should be surprised about. You tell us, Father, that it will get way worse before it becomes much better, before you come. I pray for your people. Help them to know what your word says and to live it out day by day so that we could be a shining light for you in this dark world. I thank you so much, Father, for your people. And I pray, Father, for your word that may bring transformation within the lives of your people. In your son's name we do pray. Amen.