

Luke 21:5-38

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[0:00] We have a look at Luke chapter 21, verses 5 to 38. It's on page 880 if you've got a church Bible. And it's a very, very big passage. It's what is called the Apocalypse. Sounds terrifying, doesn't it, in Luke's Gospel.

And it's an appropriate chapter in lots of ways because we live, don't we, in an apocalyptic age. Everywhere we turn and everywhere we read, we hear about kind of cataclysmic events. I don't know if you're on the newspaper this week, isn't it, that Islam has announced that Rome, they want that Rome to be the next city that they take over. Cataclysmic events, cataclysmic climate change, global terrorism, worldwide economic upheaval, wars, global terrorism, and gloomy predictions about the future.

Now, I don't know if you've noticed some of the films, isn't it, that Hollywood produce, they're often kind of cataclysmic, apocalyptic kind of films. Doomsday scenarios in lots of books and movies. And I know a lot of it is entertainment.

And yet, underneath it, there is a culture of fear. Even despair in lots of ways. Paralysis. And maybe that's where you are this morning.

[1:19] And for us, in these 30 verses or so that Jesus talks about, what he really does is he gives us a history of history. A brief history of the world between his resurrection, when he rose again from the dead, and his coming back of it.

And actually, in the chapter, there are only tiny little bits of it, which are apocalyptic. But Jesus' purpose is very practical. Jesus does not try and give you a schedule, so that you'll be able to predict the day and the end of the world when Jesus comes back.

In fact, Jesus tries to stop all that silly calculating business. The most important thing that you can learn about Luke 21, is that it comes between Luke 20 and Luke 22.

Now I know that sounds like, doesn't it, it comes from the department of extremely obvious. But it's very, very important. Because in Luke chapter 20, last week, we learnt all about the resurrection of Jesus.

And what does that mean? Do you remember, if you were here, the Jewish authorities wanted to put Jesus in his place. They wanted to put him in a hole in the ground. They wanted to kill him. But God wanted to put Jesus in his rightful place.

[2:29] To the throne of the world. At his right hand. Above every power and every person. So the resurrection, Jesus coming back from the dead, was the focus of Luke chapter 20.

But if you look to chapter 22, that will start in next week, you go instantly to his death. You go instantly to the day of darkness. When Jesus is betrayed and arrested and tortured and killed. So, between the resurrection and the death of the Lord Jesus is Luke 21. And what Jesus spells out for you and I, is what are the implications of his death and his resurrection for our lives in this world. What does it mean that the Son of God has been killed? And that the Son of God has been raised? What does it mean for history? What does it mean for Jesus to be, this morning, at the right hand of the Father who rules everything?

How does that change the way you read the BBC website? How does that change the way you read the Metro on your way to work? And Jesus wants to know this very, very big picture.

[3:35] So, three points. Number one, where is history going? Number two, what is the shape of history? And number three, how does it impact us? Which is very small topics, isn't it, for the small thing.

So, what I'm going to do is cover these three in the next 25 minutes. Firstly, where is history going? Now, of course, Jesus teaches you, the Bible teaches you, that history is a beginning and an end.

That you are not caught up in a meaningless cycle, as much as it might feel like it in work tomorrow. But the heavens and the earth are made by God. And God will bring them to an end with a new heavens and a new earth.

But in this passage, Jesus speaks about two endings. I don't know whether you spotted them. One short term, one long term. One local, one universal. One which is catastrophic for the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

And the other which is catastrophic for the whole of creation. So, let's just look at these two endings very quickly. The first ending is the ending of the temple. Look down at verse 5.

[4 : 36] Verse 5 is the little numbers. Verse 5 on page 880. The passage opens with the people admiring this magnificent temple in Jerusalem. And it was a complete wonder.

It was built on the mountain where Abraham had sacrificed Isaac. It was twice the size of Solomon's temple. And it dominated the skyline of Jerusalem. It was covered in gold.

But it was more than a magnificent building. It was a symbol of the fact that God had promised to dwell on earth. It was the promise that God was willing to meet with human beings.

And in verse 6, do you see what Jesus says? It's going to be obliterated. There's going to come a time when not one stone will stand upon the other. And his hearers, they are appalled.

And they are devastated. Because they basically feel, you might as well say, God is going to be obliterated. The temple was what they worshipped. How can you possibly say that?

[5 : 37] And when is it going to happen? What are the signs going to be? And he does that in verses 20 to 24. Jesus gives them a specific and concrete answer to when the destruction of the temple will be.

It took place in 70 AD. Let me read it to you. Verse 20. Verse 20 it says. But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you will know that its desolation has come near.

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. And let those who are inside the city depart. Get out of there. And let not those who are out in the country enter it. For these are the days of vengeance to fulfill all that is written.

You see, Jesus gives advice on what to do. He says to the people of Jerusalem, he says, run, run for your life. In his 70 AD, you can look at history. Titus brought seven divisions, four divisions of Roman soldiers.

They surrounded the city of Jerusalem at the time of Passover. He allowed an extra half a million people to enter the city. So the city was bloated. And he began a siege. The siege went on for months.

[6 : 39] He cut off water. He cut off food. And at the end of the siege, Roman legions slaughtered every living thing in the city. They burned the temple to the ground. And in the desperate attempt to claw gold from the temple, they clawed some of the gold from between the rocks.

They pulled down the temple so much that not one stone was left upon another. So when the early Christians were still in Jerusalem, and they saw the city surrounded by Roman legions, they remembered Jesus' words and they fled to a city called Pella.

Across the Jordan they were saved. And here is the Son of God on the steps of the temple. He's come to replace the temple. He is the place today where you meet with God. And he speaks about the destruction of the temple.

And the leaders of Israel, they find it intolerable. They would rather have their building. And so they have to kill Jesus. But Jesus says in this passage, that is not the end of all things.

That is not the end. There is another end that is coming. Look at verse 25. It says this. And there will be signs of sun and moon and stars and on the earth, distressed nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the seas and the waves.

[7 : 53] People fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. All those phrases come from the Old Testament. There's nothing new there. And then they will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud in power and great glory.

Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near. The catastrophic destruction of the temple was one thing.

But this kind of event is of an entirely different order. This is the coming of the Son of Man in judgment. The Son of Man is the Old Testament figure whom God has given judgment over to.

And Jesus says on that day, as he calls it in verse 34, on that great day the heavens and the earth will pass away. Each of us will stand before the Son of Man in judgment.

And he says that day when it comes in will come suddenly. And it will come unexpectedly. And it will come universally. And here is the point. The coming of the Son of Man is a direct result of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[9 : 08] And I want to show you how in Jesus' words, what is so remarkable about this chapter, and these words of Jesus about that day, is that he does not speak of judgment.

He speaks of pictures about longing and joy. And he speaks about the day when the Son of Man will come, which so terrifies us. And he speaks about it with happiness.

Four times in these verses, Jesus uses that phrase, drawing near. Drawing near. The first one, I've already read it in verse 20, when he talks about the destruction of the temple.

When the armies appear, he says, you will know that your desolation is drawing near. But the other time, he speaks about drawing near. Are the days of the Son of Man coming. And he gives a picture of beauty, and delight, and paradise.

So look at verse 28. Can you do that? Look at verse 28. Put your eyes down. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. That's a Bible word, but you know it, the word redemption.

[10 : 13] So what God did is a picture. That is what Jesus came to do. to liberate his people from slavery. From everything that kept them in bondage.

Do you remember they were in Egypt, and they were redeemed. And this is where the Bible has been going, all the way from the beginning. To free us, from those things that we've given ourselves to.

So that we will see God face to face, and we will be utterly forgiven, and utterly free. And that is what the Son of Man is coming for. To redeem his people. He comes, and he brings redemption in his hand.

The second picture is in verse 30. And it's so important that Jesus tells a little parable to explain it. It's the last parable in Luke's Gospel. Verse 29. Look at the fig leaves and all the tree.

And as soon as they come out in leaf, you for yourselves know that summer is already near. When winter hits, the trees lose all their leaves.

[11 : 11] We know that. When the spring comes, it starts to bud. When the leaves come out, you know that summer is already near. And ever since we were evicted from the Garden of Eden, ever since we were evicted from that paradise, the world has been in the grip of the deepest and darkest winter.

Our hearts have become cold and hard towards God. That is why C.S. Lewis in Narnia, he calls it, doesn't he, the grip of Satan as the winter of the white witch.

It is the opposite of joy. It is the opposite of life. But when Jesus rose from the dead, spring began. And the first flower bud.

And when we look at the shape of history, that we will in a minute, the fulfilment of Jesus' words, we will not only see that redemption is drawing near, but summer is coming.

That's the picture. I don't know whether you've thought of what a great picture summer is, of when Christ comes again. I love summer. Something weird happens in London in the summer, doesn't it?

[12 : 20] People have been hiding from each other all year. summer, you suddenly smell each other's barbecues over the fence. And you start to talk to each other. You meet one another on the street, and you stand talking out on the street.

And we eat together, we come together. We feel the warmth on our skin. We feel the warmth of each other's friendship. And there's something about summer. We come to ourselves, and this is the picture of the coming of the Son of Man.

It is redemption. It is an eternal summer. And the third time he says coming near is in verse 31. Can you see that? So also, when you see these things taking place, you know, you will know that the kingdom of God is drawing near.

The kingdom of God, if you've read Luke's Gospel, is about where King Jesus overturns all his and all our enemies. All our division. All our decay. All our death.

All our sickness. All our ostracism. All our disobedience. All our sins. It is all placed under Jesus' feet. So what the eternal summer of redemption that is coming with the Son of Man.

[13:27] What that means is that there's no tears. No mourning. No death. That everything evil will be passed away. The world that you want will have arrived.

The former things will have passed away. And in that summer, we will eat of the fruit of the tree of the life forever. It's a wonderful picture of joy. But how can Jesus make this promise to you? How can the coming of the Son of Man, which is the day of judgment, be also the day of redemption? What is it that changes the great day of reckoning, which you are terrified of, the day of judgment, into a day which is full of joy and redemption and summer?

And the answer is this. It is the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus has told us that the Son of Man who sits at the right hand of the power of God, he also says that that Son of Man who is the terrible judge is also the friend of sinners like you and me.

It's the Son of Man who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Are you willing to admit you're lost? It's the Son of Man who has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[14:39] And he repeatedly said to his disciples, the Son of Man, this all-powerful, majestic judge figure, is going to go up to Jerusalem and to be delivered into the hands of the authorities.

He will be killed and on the third day he will be raised. Where is history going? It is heading for that day when that Son of Man who was rejected by us and who died for us is going to come again in great glory and he will bring redemption and summer for all his friends.

That day, the end of history, is the direct consequence of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. So when we talk about the end of history, the one who died, the one who is coming, is the one who is coming.

The one who died, is the one who is coming and he is going to draw into his kingdom all who have acknowledged him as king and live for his kingship. That is where history is going, according to the Bible.

Secondly, what is the shape of history? Well, the death and the resurrection of Jesus do not just put the boundary line at the end of history. Jesus teaches us in this passage that they actually explain the inner dynamic of what is going on in history.

[15:58] Not just for believers, but for the whole world. And he gives us a few illustrations. He takes the destruction of the temple on the one hand. In verse 22, he says, you know why it happens.

It happens to fulfill all that is written. In verse 24, he tells us that it happens because the time of the Gentiles will be fulfilled.

In that terrible event, and it was a horrific historical event, it did not mean that was the end of God's purpose for blessing.

It did not mean that God had gone to sleep on the job. What it meant was that it was the exact fulfillment of the words that Jesus said, even in the last chapter. Do you remember we saw it last week?

Well, a couple of weeks ago. He said that the leaders of Israel, the leaders of the people that God had made promises to, they killed the son of the vineyard owner. And the owner of the vineyard will give the vineyard to others.

[17:02] Their hatred and their hostility and their rejection of Jesus does not mean the end of salvation. But it means that the treasures of God's promises and blessing now flows out from Jerusalem to the ends of the world like us today.

Because the death and resurrection of Jesus see what happened in that event. Or ticker persecution. Look at verses 12 to 19. Let me read you verse 12. Look down at verse 12.

It says this, But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogue and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Then down to verse 16. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends and some of you will be put to death. You'll be hated by all for my name's sake but not a hair of your head will perish.

By your endurance he will gain your lives. You see that throughout the gospel there's one part of Jesus' teaching that his disciples will not accept. They will not accept that this Jesus is going to suffer.

[18:15] They just won't accept it. Every time Jesus spoke about his sufferings the disciples played a tune in their minds. It's as if they put their fingers in their ears. We're not listening Jesus.

We won't listen to you. Talk to us about something else. And now he speaks to them about his suffering and I think our reaction is very much the same.

It's very understandable isn't it? Deep down you and I we feel like we shouldn't have to suffer. we deserve good treatment don't we?

Why has God let all these bad things happen in my life? We deserve good treatment. Things should not be so difficult for me. Why are they so difficult? Following Jesus I mean if God is all good and all powerful and he really loves me it shouldn't be difficult should it?

Well Jesus says here in black and white he says the Christian church is going to feast deep and difficult and ongoing persecution. Between the time of the resurrection and the time that Jesus returns the normal position of the Christian church is to be out of favour.

[19 : 27] And I think that's a great shock isn't it? You might think this preacher is trying to frighten me what is he trying to do? And you might think is he trying to sell Christianity to you?

Well I want to be honest with you this morning. And say to the call to Christianity is the call to suffer. And I think it's very easy to miss that isn't it? Because for 200 years in the West the last 200 years we as the Western church we've lived in peace haven't we?

And it's easy to think that's normal. But Jesus is saying isn't he? Jesus is saying that it's not normal. And the persecution which Jesus describes is not because you've behaved badly or horribly or you need to pull your socks up.

It is because the name of Jesus. It is because we believe what Jesus said and we seek to be like him. And that suffering is bitter it is nasty to be hated for the sake of Jesus to be imprisoned to be betrayed by members of one's own family to be delivered up by those whom we love.

And what is that? It is nothing other than the work of Jesus the death of Jesus and work in our lives shaping us and shaping the attitudes of those around us.

[20 : 38] but the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is also at work because it is isn't it? It's when the church is under great pressure that Jesus says that is the time of testimony that is the time of bearing witness of telling others.

It's when the church is being squeezed that you find the church being more and more vibrant and vital and the witness of the gospel going out. It's exactly what happened in the book of Acts.

It's exactly what is happening all over the world today that where the church is growing and most alive and vital it seems to be those places in which it's most hostile and under most pressure.

And I think we can even go so far to say that when a church finds cultural favour and is welcomed into public life it becomes increasingly weak and compromised and ineffective.

The real church Jesus said real Christians will always be under pressure. To follow Jesus means to follow his example and to take him his cross. But look right here in the middle of the passage Jesus says I will be with you and I'll give you the words to speak even in the midst of difficulty.

[21 : 53] And even though they put you to death not a hair of your head will perish. It's a resurrection word. And as the world tries to marginalise and even stamp out the church those people are amazed at the endurance of a church that trusts and risen Christ.

And our hopes are invested on his coming again when there will be summer and there will be redemption. And therefore they can take your life can't they? If you think there's a total idiot and oddball for the gospel of the Lord Jesus they can take your life but nothing will separate you from God.

suffering is not off God's radar. Suffering is not a slip up in God's control room. It is through suffering that the testimony of the church goes forward.

Because Jesus remains on the throne none of us who trust in him will ever perish. But it's not just in our lives as believers where the death and resurrection shapes history.

It is also in the headlines in your newspapers in the political economies in the social events look at verse 10 just see that nation will rise against nation kingdom against kingdom that is our world there will be great earthquakes won't there and in various places famines and pestilence there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

[23 : 18] But he says that is not the end. When you look around and you see a worsening political situation an economic and social situation the temptation is to say well the end is near and I think evangelicals people like us have been at the forefront of that silliness.

There's a lot of money to be made in frightening people isn't there? With predictions I'm cleverer than anyone else I put the inside track I can read the signs but these signs those signs are not the

signs of the end they're signs that Jesus is Lord actually they're signs that Jesus is on the throne they are the signs that between the resurrection and the return of Jesus there's always going to be upheaval and catastrophe and wars and famine and inequality and evil but it is through those things that redemption comes it is not as though when you become a Christian God puts cotton wool all around you don't think that and everything inside the ring of cotton wool happens and it's good but not outside the world no it's not like that it's in the roaring of the seas it's in the distress of the nations it's in the perplexity that God is moving he's moving his redemption forward none of it takes God by surprise it is God shaping history through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ I wish I could speak more about this but we've got time we've looked at the end of history and the shape of history but I want to finish with this how should it impact you Jesus makes two applications one to our ears and how we hear and then one to our eyes and how we see from our hearing look at verse 8 he says do not be led astray verse 8 see that you are not led astray for many will come in my name saying I am he and the time is at hand do not go after them from the beginning of the church there have been a huge crowd of people willing to stand up and say I am he I'm something special I am he literally I am it's the name of God there are people who stand up and they claim to be speaking for God for divine truth and they want to bring a fresh claim to the church there are always people who claim to be true prophets of God

I've got a message directly from the Lord for you I can bring you new revelation and do you know what God says to you he says to you don't be gullible don't be gullible Jesus says don't be gullible this morning don't go after them don't be led astray how are you to test them look at verse 33 it's a great verse that heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away Jesus says Jesus' words come from God because he is the son of God his words will never be obsolete they never pass their sound by days Jesus' words will never be outdated if you don't believe me read them they will stand the test of time and even in this very chapter he gives you an illustration of that when he predicts the fall of the temple of Jerusalem and in 70 AD it happened as he said Jesus says you can tell the charlatan you can tell the deceiver in the Christian church because they point away from my words and they speak with great originality out of their experience and they will bring some fresh truth and they'll call it some fresh word from God and Jesus says don't be taken in don't be gullible don't be led astray by all that nonsense you can tell the true preacher do you know how you can tell a true preacher in the

Christian church they've got nothing of their own to tell you they've got nothing of their own to tell you what are they going to do what does the preacher do he opens the word of God the Bible and he simply points to Jesus and his words that's what we do in this church you might think it's very very dull but that's what we do and so the application is very very simple it's are you listening to Jesus words are you are you clinging to his words are you putting yourself in the place where you can drink in his words of life and hope his eternal words don't be led astray secondly sight look at verse 34 do not despair watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life for that day will come and suddenly come upon you 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 in the stand before the son of man

[28 : 18] Jesus says there's two ways to view the world one way is to view Jesus Christ on the throne I'm going to look at the world and I'm going to look through historical events and I'm going to see that Jesus actually is in control and he knows what he's doing and the other way to look at the world is to look at the world as if Christ is not on the throne and one of the temptations for us as Christians is just to think and just to read the surface of the news to kind of wear two hats to read the news as if the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus didn't really happen or that doesn't have any bearing on what really happens now today in the world and so you look at the persecution and you look at terrorism and you look at the calamities without the eyes of faith and the temptation then is to become overwhelmed and overcome and to give into despair and Jesus says to you this morning don't let your heart be troubled don't be weighed down like that

I don't think he's speaking about literal drunkenness and being hung over but it's that spiritual attitude of having a heavy heart a heart that doesn't think clearly a heart that forgets that Jesus is on the throne and he's coming back a heart that doesn't see clearly a heart that is so weighed down that it just focuses on me and my little life and my circumstances and the earth around and all the terrible things happen that takes shelter in our little addictions because we're frightened and we

despair or he says you're going to be weighed down by the cares of this life and that phrase again is familiar in Luke's gospel it was used in chapter 8 to speak of pleasure and money and clothing and all those sorts of things filling our eyes with the vision that this world offers and when we are weighed down to despair when we do not look at our lives through the death and resurrection of Jesus when we look at the tumults and the persecutions as if the world is out of control it's though as if we've got the telescope the wrong way around and so if Jesus says to you this morning he says realize that I died for your sins realize that I am risen from the dead and I'm in heaven now and that I'm coming back again and it is not out of control he says to you don't be gullible he says watch watch he says lift up your heads because it is in these very events that you read in your newspapers you see on the internet that I am at work that my death and my resurrection are at work and these very things show you that actually things are not out of control I am on the throne and it is through these very things that the eternal summer of our redemption is coming near and so what's your choice you can live with Jesus as Lord or you can live with yourself as Lord you can call the shots how's that going going alright how's it going in 70 years time how's it going to go in 90 years time how's it going to go in 150 years time you call on the shots how's it going to go in 10,000 years time you call on the shots take your choice will will you live with Jesus Christ as Lord and the glorious truth is you can come to him today and your sins can be washed away and you can live with him as Lord now or you can be a fool and live with yourself as Lord it's great wasn't it last week Elton John came out in the newspapers it's always a great thing when Elton John comes and comments on Christianity do you remember what he said Jesus is all about love it's all about positivity and there is a sense in which that is really true but it is a love which died for sinners like you and me and it is love which has seen him risen again and it's a love which will see him come again and you and I need to pay attention to the Jesus of the Bible not the Jesus of Elton John let's pray