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SCRIPTURE:

Luke 21:5-19

21:5 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said,

21:6 "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."

21:7 They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?"

21:8 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.

21:9 "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."

21:10 Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;

21:11 there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

21:12 "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.

21:13 This will give you an opportunity to testify.

21:14 So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance;

21:15 for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

21:16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death.

21:17 You will be hated by all because of my name.

21:18 But not a hair of your head will perish.

21:19 By your endurance you will gain your souls.

When we arrive at this text, Jesus has been preaching at the beautifully adorned Temple of Jerusalem. At the beginning of this chapter He teaches about the generosity of the poor widow who puts two copper coins in the offering and how God appreciates how she gave so much out of her little. Now the Disciples are awestruck by the Temple's beauty and Jesus proclaims in verses 5-6: "*When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, (Jesus) said, "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.*" (I want to put a pin in the word days (plural). Not one day... but the day(s) when all the stones will be thrown down. We will come back to that later).

While the disciples are awed by the Temple's splendor, Jesus describes an apocalypse. The Temple is the Center of Jewish Life. Jesus tells them of the destruction of the Holy of Holies. How can it be that the soul of their lives will be struck down!

What I'd like to know from you today is... what is **your** temple that you have adorned with beautiful stones and gifts that you have dedicated to God?

Is it your church?

Your marriage and family?

Could it be your business or career?

Your body, good health, or your mind?

And what is your apocalypse? Is it our denomination splitting apart?

Your marriage ending in divorce? A diagnosis of cancer or Alzheimer's. The destruction of your home or business in a hurricane? The death of a loved one? A mental health crisis? Or even that your candidate didn't win this past Tuesday.

Although this text is apocalyptic language, in some ways, this passage is less about the Temple's destruction and more about *how* Jesus's followers should react to persecution. This scripture is the roadmap to hope.

How do we go from the destruction of the temple to verses 18 and 19 which state *But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.* What is the roadmap from apocalypse to hope?

There are three don'ts and a 'do'.

1. Do not be deceived by false prophets.

What's the old adage: "You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." That's what Luke is talking about in verse 8. "Beware that you are not led astray." It reminds me of the description from Chaplain Margaret Siemer, who said when the FBI trains its agents to identify counterfeit notes, they are not required to study fake currency. Instead they intently study genuine bills – how does the paper look and feel. One agent said, "We get to know the real thing so well, so thoroughly, that it is easy to spot the fake."

The key, to knowing a falsehood, is knowing the truth.

The truth is right here in this book. That's why we study it and have the word 'written on our hearts'. So when someone I saw on the news at a Christian conference a few weeks ago says that Jesus didn't have enough AR-15 rifles to "keep his government from killing him" you know they pedaling falsehoods and a way of life that is antithetical to the way of Jesus.

We are on the roadmap from apocalypse to hope today. So don't be deceived by false prophets.

That's the first don't.

Next.

2. Verse 9 says, don't be terrified.

The phrase "do not be afraid" is written in the bible 365 times. That's a daily reminder from God to live every day without fear and trusting in God to have your back, your front and everywhere in between. When your apocalypse comes -- trouble strikes -- our foundation is revealed. Did you see the homes in Daytona along the beach that are falling into the ocean? Their foundations are being eroded by Hurricane Ian and then Tropical Storm Nicole? What is the foundation of your faith resting upon? Sinking sand?

The air we breathe in this country the capitalistic air has persuaded us to place our faith in things -- something tangible – something I can touch. In fact, much like the children of Israel, we want an earthly king or queen to protect us so we will be safe from (you fill in the blank) and not afraid. We all want safety. I want safety.

Safe from... the stranger. (We even teach our children about stranger danger)

Safe from... oppression.

Safe from... poverty.

Safe from... bullying.

That's how we are deceived by false prophets because we are scared. We are terrified.

That's why we need to be reminded over and over: do not be afraid. We prefer a watered down Christian experience where we don't have stand against anything. But the truth is we are called to be courageous in the face of our apocalypse. Do not be terrified. Why? Because God is with us and God reminds us that we do not have a spirit of fear!

Don't be deceived and Don't be afraid.

What's the next stop on the roadmap to hope?

3. Don't get distracted

Verses 10-13: Then He said to them, "*Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. 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.*

All of things will happen why? Because you and I will be living the tenets of and values that Jesus taught us.

It will happen because of Jesus's name. But our families will not like that we love our 'so-called' enemies.

Our political and social tribes will not like that we care for the stranger.

It is easy to get distracted from our purpose to love when in verse 16 it states that ‘you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends who will put some of you to death.’

Hey, I might forget my purpose too, under those circumstances.

That’s why we need to decide in the front end that I will follow Jesus... and Jesus alone all of the way.

Not until it is uncomfortable. (pause)

Whew! This all sounds so... big and ominous. But distraction can occur on a much smaller scale and keep us from living out our purpose.

Distraction on my phone.. how much time does scrolling, posting, and liking take up in my life? How much does it distract me from connecting with people around me and sharing my life – a meal – a golf outing – a call with someone who is grieving or just lonely? Reading to children that are not mine. Preparing a meal for families, that aren’t mine. Don’t be distracted.

In this modern age. Indulgence can also be a distraction. Especially indulging our anger. This is not just a 21st Century phenomenon. I remember some old saints talking about putting their religion on the shelf to deal with one distraction or another. “Let me put this religion down for a minute so I can handle this in my own way.” So I can give someone a piece of my mind.

They were getting distracted from their purpose.

Our purpose... it’s to care for the stranger, to protect the widow, to walk humbly with our God. Our purpose is to make disciples for Jesus Christ, who will *also* love God, protect the oppressed, and serve others for the transformation of the world.

Don’t put your purpose on a shelf!

Don’t get distracted.

That’s three don’ts. Don’t be deceived. Don’t be terrified. Don’t get distracted.

Here’s the action. Here’s the one ‘do’.

Testify!

4. Testify:

I know you immediately thought, testify? What will I say? Let's look at our scripture. What does Brother Luke say?

In Luke's Gospel, the word "wisdom" occurs more than in the other three Gospels altogether.

Luke's primary distinction occurs in verse 15 ("I will give you a mouth and wisdom" unable to be contradicted). Only within the Gospel of Luke is the "Wisdom of God" a speaking agent (read Luke 11:49 to verify) and, so, in this way, God's "wisdom" will allow the persecuted followers of Jesus to speak when the time comes. Jesus says that he will provide that wisdom during that time, a wisdom—in the Lukan tradition—that is even greater than King Solomon's.

Testify! Why? Because our job is to tell it (to witness) and point people to the hope found in Jesus.

Think about it... false prophets and enemies of the cross are so proud to challenge Christian values. But when tragedy strikes, you rarely see folks proclaiming atheism. In times of trouble people go searching for wisdom warriors. They look to people who know God asking for prayer and their wisdom. And that's one of our best opportunities to tell them. To testify. Tell them about the hope we found in Jesus. Not a premeditated speech to 'make' a disciple. No, testify by sharing our experience of our loving Savior. Tell them how when you were deep in grief, Jesus was the lily in your valley. Tell them how when your heart was cracked open when your marriage or relationship ended you began to pray – or sing songs about the goodness of our Savior that Jesus was your bright and morning star. Jesus is our hope, our blessed hope. That is what it means to have 'a mouth of wisdom' described in this text.

I want to be careful to remind us that our hope does not inoculate us from what happens in the world or world events. We feel the pain of loss; the anger of attackers; the fear of tragedies. We are human and emotions are normal, in fact, they are God-given. But when chaos is all around us. When our apocalypse is raging we need to remind ourselves and others by testifying to what God has done before. How I got over. How you made it through. (pause)

Hey, do you remember the pin we put on the word days at the beginning of this sermon? All the stones of the temple do not fall at once. It happens over days (plural)

This is not our first encounter with an apocalypse. Tragedy is not a one and done thing. Lord, don't we wish that were true? We have experienced tragedies and dark nights of the soul before and the light of the world has been our refuge and strength. Jesus has walked with us through the valley before.

Hope is found in our testimony. You will find yourself buoyed by sharing your testimony (your experience with God) with others. It reinforces our faith in God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit of overcoming.

As I close, if you say the word 'apocalypse' to someone on the street, and you will conjure up in catastrophic images. Often people will say that it was fated or destiny or 'in the cards'. This fatalism is deeply embedded in the culture we live in. Often Christians (past and present) try to do an end-run around fatalism by claiming that they know precisely what the future holds. And so they've turned passages like this one in Luke 21 – and Revelations – into a kind of giant secret code that, that if we can just crack it, it will spell out in neat and precise detail what will happen in our future.

But Jesus is not interested in telling us precisely what the future holds but rather **Who** holds the future. When our apocalyptic days strike... our job is to follow the roadmap to hope. Jesus has given us the tools. 3 don'ts and a do.

Don't be deceived. Don't be terrified. Don't be distracted. And Testify to Who holds your past, present, and future.