

No Heavenly Value in Earthly Signs

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Luke chapter 21, known as the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus speaks about the future, including the destruction of the temple and the second coming. The passage is not meant to establish a timeline but rather serves as a pastoral message on how to approach difficult times with the right mindset and attitude. Jesus warns against being deceived by false signs and false Christs, emphasizing the importance of focusing on Him rather than trying to predict specific events. The sermon highlights the inevitability of wars, famines, pestilences, and persecution, urging believers to endure and possess their souls amidst hardships.

Scripture: Luke 21:5, Luke 21:8, Luke 21:10, Luke 21:12, Luke 21:14, Luke 21:16, Luke 21:18

Topics: "Endurance in Trials", "Focus on Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Luke chapter 21 and we now come to the section which is generally called the Olivet Discourse. This happens on the Mount of Olives and Jesus is speaking about the future, he's speaking about the second coming but also about the destruction of the temple. It's a very, very difficult passage to interpret.

Now, we've recently dealt with a few passages that are difficult. This one is particularly difficult because it deals with prophecy or what the learned people call eschatology and the problem is when we use this passage for the wrong purpose. The first thing we need to understand when we get to the passage is that I don't believe that this passage, particularly in Luke, and this appears in all of the synoptic gospels in Matthew, Mark and Luke, much longer in Matthew, but particularly in Luke, I don't believe that it is given to us to establish some kind of timeline, some kind of prophetic dates of this is going to happen then and then that's going to happen and that's going to happen.

You just cannot do that with this passage. It's too general, it's too broad. It is rather what we call a pastoral passage.

Jesus is speaking as a pastor, as a shepherd, and he is speaking about how we need to be, how our attitude needs to be, our approach needs to be, our mindset needs to be in the light of the fact that there are terrible things coming, including the destruction of Jerusalem, and then great difficulty right up to the end time. And so it's really dealing with us rather than with the signs. Now, we need to really deal with a passage in one shot, and obviously there's just no way we can do that.

I don't know how far we'll get. It goes all the way through to verse 38, so it's 33 verses. We'll go as far as we can by three o'clock, we'll finish and then we'll... Well, we'll go as far as we can and then we'll pick it up next week.

So let's read the first section from verse 5 through verse 19. So Luke chapter 21, reading from verse 5 through 19. Then as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, he said, these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone will be left upon another and shall not be thrown down.

And so they asked him saying, teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? And he said, take heed that you are not deceived, for many will come in my name saying, I am he, and the time has drawn near, therefore do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified, for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately. Then he said to them, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

And there will be great earthquakes in various places and famines and pestilences, and there will be fearful signs and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake, but it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.

Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost, by your patience possess your souls.

So let's take it verse by verse and see how we go. So he spoke, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations. So they were leaving the temple.

The end of the chapter tells us that Jesus would be in the temple. Remember, this is what we call Passion Week, the week before the crucifixion. He is teaching in the temple every day.

In the evenings, the end of the chapter says, he would go to the Mount of Olives and he would spend the time there. I don't know that he was sleeping there, I think he was praying, based on what happened in Gethsemane and knowing how he had lived his life. But he goes out to the Mount of Olives, which is just across the way, just across the little valley, and obviously from the Mount of Olives you can look at Jerusalem, you can see the Mount of Olives from the other side.

And so they looked at the temple and they were saying, you know, Jesus, look at this magnificent temple. And it indeed was a magnificent building. Herod had begun to build this several years before, and it would still be in building for another thirty-odd years after this.

Now remember, this is not, he didn't, when I say he built it, he didn't build it, he remodeled it. So remember that the second temple was rebuilt, the temple was destroyed, the first temple was destroyed in the Babylonian captivity. Then it was rebuilt under Ezra and Nehemiah and Zerubbabel, in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah particularly.

So they rebuilt the temple. Obviously they had some money from Persia that had been sent, but the nation was very poor, they had come out of captivity at that time, and so clearly the temple was not all that magnificent when it was rebuilt. And in fact there were those who were complaining and saying, well this is nothing like it used to be.

Herod then comes and he then remodels the building, and he's working on this for even beyond his own lifetime, they finish the work, and so it takes seventy-odd years for them to remodel it. And it ends up being a magnificent building, really really spectacular, and I'll give you a little bit of a picture of it in a moment. Why did he build it? Well obviously because he thought of himself as being a Jew, although he was not.

He was really an Edomite, the enemies of the Jews, but he had obviously taken up the title for himself. And remember that these Caesars tried to build their legacy in the form of architecture, and so you can still go to Rome and you can still see some of the stuff that the various Caesars had built, and that was their way to build for themselves some kind of lasting legacy. And the same was true of the temple.

So it was magnificent, and it says that it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations. And I'm going to read a little bit from the history of the time. The stones were quite something.

Now this is on the inside of the foundation, so this is not the actual temple. The actual temple is not there anymore, but the foundation and the platform on which the temple stood is still there. And this is a part of the foundation on the inside.

If you look at the bottom part, you'll see that this is one stone. Some of these stones were, and I need to look at the notes, they were basically, I tried to figure it out, and some of these stones which are still there are three of the containers, the shipping containers that we have in the back. They were three of those containers in length, and the same height and wider.

So the actual dimensions would be 75 feet by 8 feet, which is the height of that container, by 10 feet, which is two feet wider than the container. Now how they moved them, these are things that fascinate me, but we don't know about that. But clearly these are the kinds of things they were pointing out.

And they were saying to Jesus, look at this, look at this magnificent stuff. And then they speak about the donations, and so gold and silver had been given for the building of the temple, and the building had been adorned with it. So what I'm going to do very briefly, and I think, I hope you find it interesting, but it gives us an idea of what Jesus is speaking about.

And so I'm going to read from a, well, it's very small. So from a historian, and his name is Josephus. Now this book, just incidentally, is over 200 years old, one of my little treasures.

Josephus lived at this time, and we're going to speak in a moment about the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. In A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed, it was destroyed by a Roman general called Titus. Titus was the son of Flavius, who was the Caesar at the time.

And Titus would become the Caesar in a few years' time. So Titus was the man who destroyed the temple. And in fact, you can still go to Rome, and there's an arch with carvings in the arch depicting Titus's victory over Jerusalem, and pictures of his soldiers carrying the menorah, the lampstand, and the various pieces of furniture of the temple.

Now, why this is important is because Josephus, the historian, was Titus's interpreter when the temple was destroyed. So here's a guy who had first-hand experience. Obviously this is not the Bible, this is simply history, but it confirms exactly what Jesus said.

So I'm going to try and read it. I didn't think I would have, because the lighting's not that great. So he says, the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes.

For it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight. And the first rising of the sun reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers when they were at a distance like a mountain covered with snow.

For as to those parts of it that were not gilt, covered with gold, they were exceedingly white. On its top it had spikes with sharp points to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it. Of its stone, some of them were 45 cubits in length, that's 75 feet, 5 in height, that's 8 feet in height, and 6 in breadth, that's 10 feet.

Before this temple stood the altar, 15 cubits high and equal both in length and breadth. Each of the dimensions was 50 cubits, about 70 feet. So a magnificent building.

And so obviously they're pointing to Jesus, and they're saying, just look at this, this is our national identity. This is who we are. This is the center of, and remember that in Jewish thinking, the Israel was the center of the world.

The same way as we believe America is the center of the world today. Israel to them was the center of the world. The temple was the center of Jerusalem.

And the holy place, well the holiest of all, was the center of the temple. So for them, and in a sense they were right, everything revolved around that temple. The whole world revolved around it.

And so they're looking at this, and Jesus looks at it, and he says, these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone will be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. Now obviously what Jesus was talking about was what I spoke about, Titus destroying the temple. So the Jews in A.D. 63, so that would be 30 years after Jesus' crucifixion and ascension, about 30 years later, the Jews would revolt against Rome.

Rome came down on Israel in A.D. 65, 68. There was a change of Caesars in Rome at the time, Flavius became Caesar, and the battle against Israel was stopped. And in fact, the title of this book, because the one I've shown you, this book contains two of his books, and the one is The Wars of the Jews, which deals particularly with this battle.

And so later on, Titus would come and he would then destroy Jerusalem. Everyone would be carried away in captivity, and that would be the end of Israel until 1948. And so these things which you see, the days will

come when not one stone will be left upon another, all will be thrown down.

There are still some of those stones that are thrown down. And there's another picture. And so right around the temple mount, right around the foundations of the temple, or the plinths on which the temple was built, are still these stones that had been thrown down as they destroyed the temple.

The story is, and I have heard mixed reports, I'm not sure if it's true, but the story is that when they torched the temple, they set the thing alight, the gold melted and the silver melted and ran in between the stones. And so the soldiers in pillaging tried to get to the gold and in the process they broke the stones apart in order to get to the gold that had run in between the stones, thus fulfilling the prophecy. All right, so now this is important because what we see is Jesus' prediction which comes exactly true.

So remember the context. They're saying, look how great this is. And Jesus says, no, it's not going to last.

It's going to be destroyed. He doesn't give a timeline. And this is important.

So it could have been in five years, it could have been in 100 years, and it turns out to be 30 years later. And so they asked him, saying, teacher, when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? So here's the question that they were obsessed with. They asked this question many times, and it's the same question which is being asked today.

What are the signs? Is Jesus coming this year? Is he going to come in, some said, 1988? People have had all sorts of dates. What is the sign when he's going to come? And Jesus does not answer the question. This is important, because we're still obsessed with these signs.

And I'm going to show you a verse, in fact the next verse, that really hit me for the first time this morning when I read the passage again for I don't know how many a time. And so what are the signs? And he said to the question of the signs, and remember that this is probably the question that more Christians are asking today than any other question. The question that is most asked by Christians today is, what are the signs? And he said, take heed that you do not be deceived, for many will come in my name saying, I am he.

So he's saying there are many false Christs that will come. And we know that there have been many false Christs. But here's the bit that I never noticed before this morning.

Many will come in my name saying, I am he, and the time has drawn near. Now he says, don't be deceived. Now we're not deceived.

As a Bible-believing church, we're not deceived by people who are saying, I'm the Christ. In fact, most of American and Western Christianity have been deceived in recent years in following politicians, believing that they are the saviors of the world. But we should not be deceived by that.

But here is the problem, that they are saying the time has drawn near. Jesus is coming because COVID is a sign. And we're going to see pestilences in the passage.

Jesus is coming. When was it, 19, when we walked, when man walked on the moon, or landed on the moon the first time, 69, 70, I think it was 1970. I was still at school.

69, I think it was. And Christians were saying, the Lord is coming because we've landed on the moon. I've lived long enough to hear thousands of predictions.

Jesus is coming because this has happened, or that's happened. Now, folks, please understand me. And those who are watching the video, don't take this out of context.

I believe in imminence. I believe that Jesus can come very soon, will come very soon. I believe he can come at any moment.

But I believe that because he said so, not because of this sign or that sign. And what he is saying is that there will be deceivers who will be saying, look at these signs. Jesus is coming.

He says, do not go after them. You say, well, what's the problem? Shouldn't we understand the signs? Yes, we should understand the general time in which we're living. Jesus says, you're able to read the sky and say, what kind of weather are we going to have tomorrow? And you'll see later on, probably next week, he speaks about the budding of the trees.

And just this week, I saw the pomegranate tree on the other side beginning to bud. And we know that spring is near, that summer is coming. So he's saying we need to understand that kind of thing.

But when we become obsessed with the signs, he says, don't follow them. And I've said this before, and I'm going to say it again, because it's important. The biggest source of money making in evangelical Christianity today is what we call prophecy update ministries.

And there's a whole bunch of them. And a lot of people who follow me and watch my videos and follow me on Facebook, follow these guys as well. And every Sunday, they will come out with a new video and they take the newspaper and they say, Biden did this.

You see, it's a sign. This is what it means. Oh, this happened in the Ukraine.

This is what it means. Jesus is coming. Folks, I've lived through this for 50 years, and he still hasn't come.

Now, I'm not being like those in Peter who's saying, where is he coming? He is not slack concerning his promises. But what we're doing is that we're crying wolf. And you know what happened to the boy who cried wolf? Maybe for the younger people who don't know the story.

If I remember the story correctly, is it Aesop's fables? I think so. But anyway, the guy, little guy lived out in the country, and he would say, there's a wolf and everybody runs. And the next day, there's a wolf, everybody runs.

And then one day, there was a real wolf and nobody ran. And folks, this is what we've been doing, not just for the 50 years that I've been a Christian, but for 2000 years now. And folks, the world no longer believe us when we say Jesus is coming soon, because we've cried wolf too many times.

And that's the point that Jesus is making. He says, don't follow those who say I'm a Christ, and don't follow those who read the signs. Follow Jesus.

And that's the whole point of this passage is, walk right with God, be ready for his return at any moment. Don't try and read the signs, because you're going to misread them. I've watched greater men than me misread the signs.

I'm tired of hearing, how many times have I heard, oh, this one is the Antichrist, that one is the Antichrist. I mean, up very recently, ISIS was the Antichrist. And I'm not saying ISIS is completely gone, we know it

isn't.

But it clearly is not the world force that it was attempting to be at one time. Now, folks, let's not be hung up on the signs, let's be hung up on Jesus. Let's be ready, because he's coming at a time that we don't expect.

We have the same problem with the earthquake. Everybody wants an early warning system. Everybody wants something that on their phone will tell them five days before the time, the big one will be on that dime at six o'clock in the morning, and so on, and so on, and so on.

And it's just not going to happen. At the best, we're going to get a few seconds. And even then, maybe not.

So what do we need to do? Well, exactly what we don't do, and that is be ready. Have your kit with your food and water and all of that stuff. And I know none of us do that.

Or we all try, but we don't do too good at it. The point is to be ready. And the point with his return is be ready.

Why do we want the signs? So that I can live a careless life, and then five minutes before he comes, I want to get my life in order so that I'm ready for him to come. Folks, for 2,000 years, the true church has lived in expectancy and with a life that is ready for the Lord to return at any time. Don't follow those who say I'm the Christ, and don't follow those who peddle the signs.

But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified. For these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately. Notice that last phrase, the end will not come immediately.

So what is he saying? He's saying there will be wars and commotions. Matthew says rumors of wars. He says, but that's not the end.

That's not the sign. Since Jesus spoke, we've only had just over 200 years where there's been no war on the face of the earth in 2,000 years. There's always war.

In AD 70, when Jerusalem would be destroyed, it would be a terrible war for the Jews, for those that he was speaking to, because it literally was the end of their nation. They ceased to exist as a nation in their land, and they were destroyed. They were scattered through the rest of the world, as I said, until 1948, for 2,000 years.

This was cataclysmic as far as they were concerned, but he says that's not the end. And if you go back to the Christian writings during the first world war and the second world war, you will find thousands and thousands of sermons and books written saying this is the end. This is Armageddon.

Hitler is the Antichrist. And of course, Hitler is a picture of the Antichrist, but he was not the Antichrist. We know that now, and hindsight is 20-20.

They sincerely believed that this was it, and Jesus says no, it's not it. And so you cannot—what he is saying, I believe, is you cannot look at wars and say this is a sign that Jesus is coming. Right now, nobody knows really what's going on and what's going to happen, but there seems to be—we seem to be at the brink of war in Eastern Europe right now, and it could potentially be a world war.

If things develop, somebody just makes the wrong decision and fires off a cannon at the wrong time and the wrong place, it could trigger off a world war. I hope not. But does that mean Jesus is—no.

He is coming whether there are wars or no wars. That's not the point. Verse 10, then he said to them, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

This is just the way it's going to be. Now, this wasn't new. This is the way it had been all along until Jesus came, and it's the way it's been since then, and it continues even today.

Nation is rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, China against the West, Russia against everyone else, the Islamic countries against everyone else, nations against nations. There's wars going on all the time. He says that's the way it's going to be.

Don't think life is going to be easy is really the point he's making, and there will be great earthquakes in various places. Now, I've seen endless analyses of earthquakes over the centuries or for however long we have records of saying, look, there's an increase in the frequency of earthquakes. Doesn't prove anything.

They will happen. You may be able to one of these days catch a ship from Vegas to go to Hawaii, and half of California falls into the sea. It still doesn't mean, I'm not saying it's going to happen.

Certainly hope not. But that doesn't, even if it happens, even if half of California breaks off and falls into the sea, it doesn't mean Jesus is coming because of that. He's coming because he said he's coming.

That doesn't prove anything. And there will be famines. We have famines all over the world.

We have a very real famine in America. I think that got your attention. Yes, malnutrition is one of the biggest problems we face in the United States.

Not because there's not food, but because people are eating the wrong food. Our kids are growing up malnourished. It's a famine.

There are real famines in other parts of the world where people have no food to eat whatsoever. There have always been famines. There have always been pestilences.

Oh, COVID, this is it. And again, you can just search on internet. COVID, second coming.

You'll end up with hundreds of things. But remember, this is not the first pestilence we've had. Well, it's maybe the first one we've had, but it's not the first one the world has had.

We've had the Black Plague. We've had major pestilences over the centuries. There will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

Everything is going to be upside down, global warming. But here's the bit that impacts us. Before all these things, now, I don't believe when he says before, he's giving a sequence of events.

He's simply saying, this is what's closer to you personally than those wars and pestilences and earthquakes. So, this is more imminent for you. They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to synagogues and prisons.

You'll be brought before kings and rulers for my namesake. When would that happen? Before the second coming? No, for 2,000 years, it would continue. The very men that he was speaking to would all, except

John, as far as we know, be martyred for the faith.

Peter would be imprisoned in the book of Acts. The other apostles would be imprisoned. Paul would be imprisoned and eventually be killed.

Obviously, Paul wasn't necessarily part of this group, but he lived at that time. So, the persecution was going to begin literally the day after Jesus died, or was raised. And it will continue until the end.

So, the same way, and that's why it's important that we look at this passage with a fresh pair of eyes. And I know that there are those who are listening and those who are watching and saying, well, this brother doesn't believe in the second coming. Let me emphasize again, I believe in the second coming.

But we need to be careful that we don't read things into the scriptures that are not there. And this passage does not give us any kind of signs. You see, if the earthquakes and the pestilences and the wars in the previous verses were a sign of Jesus' coming, then persecution is a sign of his coming, because it's all part of the same discussion.

But just like wars, pestilences, and famines have continued for 2,000 years, and way beyond that, the same way persecution has continued. Will there be an increase in the intensity of these things? I think so. But that's just my opinion.

I have no scripture that says that the intensity is going to increase, but I think it will. But what he is saying is there's going to be hardship, there's going to be wars, famines, pestilences, and persecution. And he says that's what's going to affect you personally, but it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.

You see, this is why I say this is pastoral. This has to do with them and their relationship with the Lord, far more than it has to do with signs. So Jesus says there's going to be persecution.

What is the purpose of the persecution? Well, obviously from the devil's point of view, it's to destroy the church. But he says from God's point of view and from our point of view, it is an opportunity for the gospel. It is an opportunity for the gospel.

Why did Paul want to go to Rome? Because he wanted to be imprisoned and get killed? No. He is clear. He says, I have to go to Rome to preach the gospel to Caesar and to his household.

You see, now our mindset today is, no, we don't want persecution. And I don't want persecution. I'm not crazy.

You may think I am, but I'm not. I don't cherish persecution, but I understand that persecution is important because it cleanses and purifies. But in this particular text here, it's an opportunity to be a testimony.

And folk, when we go through war, when we go through famines, when we go through financial hardship, when we go through COVID, when we go through persecution, it's an opportunity for testimony to testify to God's goodness and to the gospel. But what have we done in these last two years? I mean, I'm speaking about the church in general. Has the church been a testimony to the world in the light of the pestilence that we've just been going through and still are going through? No.

In fact, the church has sullied the name of Christ and got itself into all sorts of conspiracies and nonsense. Instead of saying, no, we are different, we have hope. And our hope is not in the vaccine or in horse medicine or in the mask.

Our hope is in Jesus Christ. Our hope is not in another government in two years or three years time. Our hope is in Jesus.

But what the church has said is, no, our hope is in this party or that party. Our hope is in science or against science. No, our hope is in Jesus.

And that is our testimony. And the church, and I'm saying the church, the visible church has lost its testimony in these last two years. God help us that we may be those who have our testimony that these difficulties, wars, pestilences, famine, persecution is an occasion for us to show the world that we have hope.

That even if we're dying of hunger, we have hope. Even if they're killing us and our sons on the battlefields, we have hope. And even when our whole life has been turned upside down through COVID and we can't do the things we used to do, and we have to wear masks and we have to do all of these various things, that doesn't affect who we are because we have hope in Christ.

It's an opportunity for testimony. Therefore, settle it in your hearts, decide for yourself, make up your minds, not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer. So when persecution comes, now again, I've said this before, I'm going to remind you again.

We say, no, well, you know, this is for guys living in North Korea or in Islamic countries where there's real persecution. We don't have a, it's not our issue. This will come.

It will come to America. Roger will escape it. I hope I will escape it.

But those of you who are younger will not escape it. Things are changing in this country. And Christians will be persecuted in this country.

Believe me. And I pray that this tape will still be available when that happens in 20 years, 30 years. I don't know how long it's going to take, but it's going to happen.

He says, don't try and figure out how you're going to answer. And of course, this applies to all who've been persecuted all along. Now, just by the way, these two verses, these two verses are abused by Christians who say, well, you know, a preacher shouldn't prepare his message before he's going to preach, because God will tell him what to say.

Now, I believe in the anointing of the spirit. I believe in inspiration. I believe that God does help me to speak, but God does not anoint laziness or ignorance.

This does not deal with preaching. This deals with being brought before the magistrates, before the courts, because of your faith. And he says, don't worry what you're going to say.

I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all of your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. Now, is this true? Well, it happened in the book of Acts. Remember, they brought the disciples and they brought them to court and it says they were amazed because these men were simple fishermen.

And yet they were able to argue from the scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah and that he was to be crucified and to be raised. And I believe it's still a promise for us today. Again, this is important because, again, we live in this false sense of security.

We say, well, it's never going to happen to me. And yet at the same time, there are many Christians who are incredibly worried and say, well, I don't know what I'll do when I get persecuted. Don't worry about it, Jesus says.

Don't worry about it. I'll be there with you. Remember, Paul says that when he appeared before Caesar, he says, everyone scattered.

I was alone. But he says, the Lord didn't forsake me. He was there with me when I spoke to Caesar in my defense or in the defense of the gospel.

He was really defending the gospel, not himself. So, if you're one of those who's worried about what's going to happen and how will I deal with persecution? Will I fold or will I stand? Don't worry about it. He will stand with you.

He will tell you what to say at that time and how to respond. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. I'm going to try and push through another few verses to come to a place where we can conclude.

Betrayal is going to be real. Folk betrayal is real. Over the centuries as Christians have been persecuted, many of those who were their closest friends and allies betrayed them.

Even now it's happening. God help us that we may not be like Judas who sold our friend. And so you will be betrayed.

Again, what is he saying? You see, these are not signs. He's saying, this is what's going to happen. He's not giving a time because this covers the 2000 years of Christianity up to now.

But he's saying betrayal is real. If it wasn't, then Judas would have betrayed Jesus. But betrayal is real and it will happen.

And some of you will die and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. Let me remind you again that even though we live in a free country with freedom of religion, more Christians are being persecuted for the faith today than are free. Statistically, more Christians are living in countries where they are suppressed, where they are persecuted at different levels to the extremes of North Korea and less so in other countries than are free.

We are blessed. We are fortunate to never have suffered persecution. I never suffered persecution in South Africa nor here.

Obviously, there was always been some persecution from those who betray us, from those who said that we're one of them, but in fact are not. But betrayal or persecution from a government point of view, we've never had that. But that does not mean that this is not a very real and central part of Christianity.

Because over the centuries, millions, millions of Christians have been persecuted for the faith. And even now, many are dying right now for the faith. This is real.

But here's the promise, not one hair. I'm going to finish on verse 19. Not one hair of your head will be lost.

Now, we can easily take that out of context. Oh, you see, Jesus says, I'm never going to, I'm never going to, I'm never going to suffer. Is that what he's saying? Well, he's just said, you'll be hated, the verse before.

They will put you to death. So what is he saying then? Not a hair of your head will be lost. So you see the Bible's fake because it contradicts itself.

Three verses before, he said, you're going to die. Now, he says, no, not a hair of your head will be lost. Clearly, what Jesus is saying is from God's perspective, nothing that is important will be lost.

What is important? Well, to us, my physical life is important. But remember that from God's perspective, eternal life is important, is more important. God's not interested in how many hair we have, hairs we have on our head.

God is interested in my face. And so you can see that the context clearly says he's not talking about physical hair, but he is saying it will not affect you. I said, but how do you get through persecution and not be affected if your face is in the right place? As you know, I love to read biographies of saints that have gone by.

I just over Christmas read about one of the great men who started the revival in Scotland in the 1700s and how he was burnt at the stake. But, you know, again, the testimony of every one of these men was that while their bodies were being tormented, their souls and their spirits were not touched by the flames, by the sword, by the rack, by the whips, by the stuff they endured. You see, because it's not about my body, it's about my soul and my spirit.

And he says, it will not affect your soul and your spirit. Everything else can be taken and they can kill you. Remember, Jesus says, don't fear them, it kills the body.

But fear him who can cast both soul and spirit into hell. So that's what's important. It's not where we are at physically.

Our last verse, but your patience, by your patience endure, sorry, possess your souls. The word patience here, endurance. Remember these two words are the same.

There's only one Greek word and unfortunately it's, patience in the old English used to mean endurance and today it means something different. So by endurance, keep your souls. When COVID hits, endure.

When persecution comes, endure. When your family turns against you, endure. When hard times come financially, endure.

When war comes, endure. And as we endure, we keep our souls. Don't give up.

Now, you see why we must read this whole thing in context. So what is Jesus saying? He's saying tough times are coming. There's going to be wars, there's going to be famines, there's going to be pestilence, there's going to be persecution, but he says you need to endure.

That's the point. And when we start digging into these passages and trying to say, well, you see the wars that, so we've had more wars now than we've had before, so that means Jesus is 10 years out. We missed the total point of the passage.

The point of the passage is it's not going to be easy, but endure. He who endures to the end will be saved. And as we endure, he will keep us so that nothing will touch us.

Yes, they will kill the body, but they cannot touch the soul. Now, folk, I know for us here in America, this is all unreal. This is all in another world, but it's real.

The battle is real. And we need to hold on because Jesus is coming and he's coming soon. Father, we pray that you'd help us to understand.

Lord, forgive us for getting so involved in the little details about this sign or that sign and missing the very point that you're making. But Lord, we pray that we may be those who will endure to the end. Lord, as this world becomes increasingly anti-Christian, as the church becomes increasingly apostate, we pray that you'd help us to be those who cling to Jesus, who cling to the blessed hope that he is coming soon.

And Lord, as we'll see later on in the passage, that we would look up and have our eyes fixed on Jesus because he is coming. So help us to understand, Lord. But above all, help us to live our lives in the light of eternity and not in the light of the here and now.

Help us, Lord, to live our lives as though we were already because we already are in eternity in a sense, rather than those who are looking for a sign so we can figure out and adjust our lives at the last minute. So Lord, we pray that you'd help us in Jesus' name. I pray for those who leave us now that you'd go with them, keep them and protect them.

And Lord, as we come around your table this morning, I pray that Jesus' presence may be sweet and as we remember the great work that you did when you saved us on that cross of Calvary. But Lord, also as we come to the table, we remember that Jesus said, I will not do this until I do so new in the Father's kingdom. And so Lord, every time we come to the table, it reminds us that Jesus is coming again and that we will one of these days sit at that marriage feast of the Lamb and we will remember what he has done with him at the head of the table.

Lord, help us to understand it. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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