

## **Open-Mouthed Tourists**

November 13, 2022

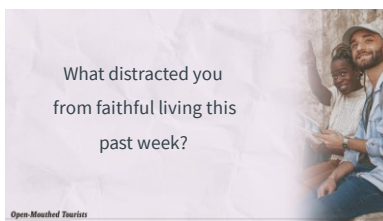
### **Luke 21:5-19**

<sup>5</sup> When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, <sup>6</sup> “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.”

<sup>7</sup> They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> “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.” <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; <sup>11</sup> there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

<sup>12</sup> “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. <sup>13</sup> This will give you an opportunity to testify. <sup>14</sup> So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; <sup>15</sup> for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. <sup>16</sup> You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup> You will be hated by all because of my name. <sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup> By your endurance you will gain your souls.



As we begin this time together, let's start with a question:  
What distracted you from faithful living this past week?

Maybe it was a pressing work obligation. Maybe it was a hardship that a family member or close friend was struggling with. Maybe it was some news that you received that was hard to take. Maybe there was an election this past week. Maybe there was a really hard decision to make about your long-term future. Or maybe it was something entirely different.

What distracted you? That is the question underlying our passage for this week. Like the disciples in our text, we can be distracted by those things we see around us and we can lose sight of our reason for living as disciples of Jesus Christ. Distracted, we fail to live a life that proclaims the good news of Jesus. As we prepare to look at the call to stand firm in our faith so that we can gain life and so that we can share abundant life with others, let us pray...

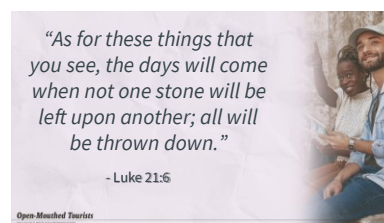


If you've ever been to a big city like New York or Los Angeles or Boston or Chicago, you've seen them on the sight-seeing trolleys or you've passed them by on the streets. They often wear bright colored shirts and have cameras dangling around their necks. They lean way back to try to see all the way to the top of the skyscrapers. Their eyes are wide open, their mouths agape, as they try and take in everything at once. They are almost frozen in time, trapped by all that is buzzing and moving around them. Caught in the wonder of it all, they do not even notice the joggers and couriers or the quick-moving pedestrians trying to get to work on time. The regular city folk just shake their heads at these open-mouthed tourists as they stand stationary in the middle of the traffic flow. These tourists are the disciples in today's passage.

They stand in awe of the temple, *“adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God.”* There was nothing like this in the small villages of Galilee and Judea.

The temple was actually quite amazing. It was truly a wonder to behold. The disciples, these simple fishermen and other small-town folk, they are star-struck by the beauty and grandeur of the temple. After all, the artistry and craftwork that had been poured into the temple was intentional. It was meant to bring about awe and wonder. All was done for the glory of God, so the temple itself sought to reflect the power and might of God.

Yet just as a New Yorker snaps at a tourist blocking the flow of traffic, Jesus doesn't seem to have time for tourists either. With a sharp word, Jesus brings the disciples back to earth. In verse 6 Jesus says, *“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.”* This beautiful building, this edifice to God, it will all be laid to waste. Talk about bringing the joy crashing back down to the earth. Maybe this is more than the disciples needed to know. Why is Jesus so cross with the disciples?



Well, the time is ticking. The end is drawing near. Jesus has just had another clash with the religious authorities. The teaching that comes in the rest chapter 21, following today's passage, it will be the final straw. As Jesus ends that discourse, the religious leaders begin to actively plot to kill him. Jesus needs the disciples to stay focused. He needs to prepare them for what is soon to come. Preparation time for the Passover is just around the corner.

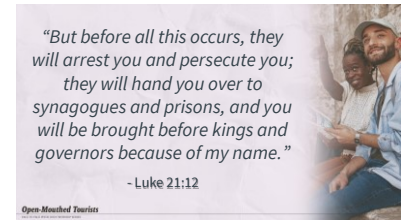
Jesus needs the disciples to pay attention to what really matters as he readies them for the horrific events about to befall their Lord and Savior during what we know as Holy Week.



While the distraction that draws these touristy stares in our scripture is the beautiful temple, often it is terrible things that distracts us from our walk of faith. Wars and rebellion and protest and violence can distract us. False prophets and petty arguments in the church can distract us. Natural disasters can distract us. All sorts of other things can distract us from proclaiming the name of Jesus with our lives. Many things can pull us away from living with hope and confidence. Many things can make us question if God really has the whole world in God's divine hands. Think back to the question that we began this time with: What distracted you from faithful living this past week? Maybe some of your answers were big and scary and ominous.

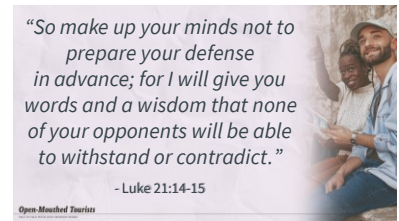
This is what Jesus speaks of. After warning them against false prophets that claim to speak in Jesus' name, he gives this warning about things to come in verses 9 through 11. Here we read: *"When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately... 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."* The list makes it sound like the world will fall apart. War, terror, earthquakes, famine, plagues. I do not know about you, but many days I see similar headlines and wonder.

And if this is not bad enough news, listen to what Jesus tells his disciples next. Heads certainly reeling from the glimpse of the difficulties to come, Jesus says to them: *“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.”* If it were me, maybe I’d ask Jesus if we could just have the war, terror, earthquakes, famine, and plagues. This other stuff sounds so personal.

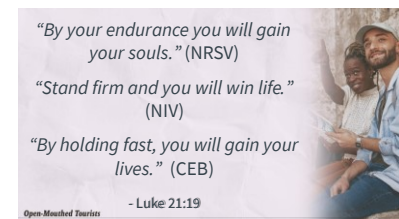


I believe that is Jesus’ point, though. The disciples are about to see Jesus live out these words. They are about to have a front-row seat to arrest and persecution, to imprisonment and trial before kings and governors. The disciples will very soon understand what Jesus means as he seeks to literally prepare them for what lies ahead. Also speaking to how he will walk through these violent and horrific acts, in verse 13 Jesus says, *“This will give you an opportunity to testify.”* In these moments of trial and persecution, Jesus says to the disciples: “You too will have the opportunity one day to witness to your faith.” This is what Jesus did as he endured his final hours. Jesus knew that the actions of a broken world, the forces at work that would lead to his crucifixion, he knew that they were necessary for the larger and greater plan of God to be worked out. In faith, as Jesus walks into this brokenness, and he will offer words of grace and mercy and even forgiveness. He will model this way of humility and courageous faith that he expects from his disciples and followers as they each come to this same moment in their lives.

Jesus is offering the disciples a fresh perspective, an opportunity for realignment, even an invitation to commit once again to their walk with him. In verses 14 and 15 Jesus tells the disciples, *“So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.”* He is calling them to live by faith and to trust in the power of the Spirit. It is a promise that he has made to them already – to send the Advocate who will lead and guide them as they walk forward in faith.



Jesus is preparing his followers so that they can stand firm when the world feels like it is falling apart, when the trials and persecution ramps up. The words that the Holy Spirit will bring will allow them to face down all the threats and challenges that are sure to come. In the final verse of our passage, Jesus encourages the disciples, reminding them that God is in control. In the NRSV this verse reads, *“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”* This translation emphasizes the eternal. In the CEB, it reads, *“By holding fast, you will gain your lives.”* This translation emphasizes the here and now. And in the NIV it reads, *“Stand firm and you will win life.”* This translation is more of a both/and.



Yes, Jesus says, in the end your faithful discipleship will lead to your salvation, to life eternal. But it also impacts your life here, now. To attain the desired end result, Jesus points out the cost of living a sacrificial witness. To live such a life requires holding onto a hope that is bigger than people can see while practicing a love that is worth both living and dying for.



You know, a funny thing happens when we choose to live for God and for others, to sacrifice self for the good of the other. The happenings of the world come to matter more instead of less. The wars and violence, the suffering and the

brokenness, these things matter more because our commitment to Christ and to living a sacrificial life is lived out as we seek to minister to the people living in the midst of these challenging things. Because God cares, our lives and witness declare that we too care about the brokenness of the world and about the people who are being affected by the brokenness. We declare our faith by caring for the hurting, by giving to and by serving the needy, by advocating for necessary change, and by bringing reconciliation and healing to broken relationships and systems.

Let's begin to go back full circle. The disciples were wide-eyed and open-mouthed as they gawked at the beauty of the temple. When the disciples and later followers of Christ entered the brokenness and the hurt of the world and offer love and grace and mercy and healing and wholeness, then those who are of the world stand wide-eyed and open-mouthed because of the disciples' willingness to live a life of love and transformation, even in the face of persecution and suffering and conflict.

We all know the song, "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love." The early church literally lived this out. Their faith drew others to want to know about this Jesus. Their commitment to Christ even in the face of death inspired others to learn about their Jesus.



Almost all of the first disciples died a cruel and painful death. Many of the apostles' symbols represent the method of their execution. Andrew died on a saltire – a cross in the shape of an “x”. Along the top row you can see the cross behind the two fish.



Bartholomew's symbol has a flaying knife. It is there on the first one in the middle row. Simon was sawed in two. For each, their faith demanded their life. Filled with belief and courage, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, they were willing to pay this price.

We stand in this long tradition. While we do not quite feel like we might face the sword or saw or scimitar, and while we might not be called to be a martyr, we are called to gather and worship and to live our lives as a means to pass on a word through courageous faith, clinging at times to the hope we find in Jesus Christ. Yes, my friends, we may not be called to be martyrs, but we are called to the same courageous faith, even if the price is paid in small, daily installments. As we go forth, may we be filled with courage and hope. May we seek to live a life that draws others to Christ. May we live so boldly that our witness to the faith leaves people wide-eyed and open-mouthed, longing to meet our Jesus. May our faith reveal Christ to others. May it be so for you and me. Amen and amen.





**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. As you seek to grow in your discipleship, how can the new heart that grows inside of you become more and more Jesus' heart?
- 2) *Pray*. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger. What in your life calls you to prayer so that you can better reflect these traits of God?
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 22:54-65. Recently, when put to the test of faith, have you failed or stood firm? If you did not stand firm, what might lead you to proclaim Christ or your faith next time?