

What to Expect in Life

Luke 21:12-19

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for March 24, 2024

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After helping His disciples understand the end times, Jesus turned His attention to equipping His disciples to be prepared for what their lives will be in the present. We still live in that period of history between Christ's two comings, so the lessons from His teaching are just as applicable to us today. Stephen Davey takes us through six of these implications in today's lesson.

A few months ago, I read an article that had been published in the New York Times; it was written by two journalists and was about the persecution of Christians in the Hindu dominated country of India.

While we tend to focus on the persecution of believers in the Middle East, and for good reason, we can overlook the growing intensity of persecution in places like India.

Jeffrey Gettleman and Suhasini Raj wrote about a faithful pastor whose church had been shut down. Some 400 church members were told to never meet again, and their pastor, Vinod Patil, was warned by Hindu authorities that if they caught him preaching again, they would kill him.

The article records a typical day for this pastor who was now shepherding an underground church. The article reads:

“He leaves his house quietly and never in a group. He jumps on a small Honda motorbike and putters past little towns and scratchy wheat fields, Bible hidden inside his jacket. He constantly checks his mirrors to make sure he is not being followed.

On this cold winter day, Pastor Patil arrived at a secret service in an unmarked farmhouse. He quickly stepped inside. On a dusty carpet that smelled like sheep, church members waited for him. As he stepped forward, a dog outside barked and a church member whispered in fear, ‘What was that?’

Pastor Patil reassured them all God was watching over them, no matter what happened. He opened his worn, Hindi-language Bible and rested his fingers on Luke chapter 21, a passage for his fearful yet faithful flock. With his own voice trembling, he read, ‘They will seize you and persecute you . . . they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me.’”

Jeffrey Gettleman and Suhasini Raj, “Inside the Persecution of India’s Christians,” The New York Times (12-22-21)

This happens to be the expectation the Lord predicted for His followers, and it has been, in fact, a description of church history over the past 2,000 years.

The freedom we have as a church in this country today is unique—it is historically unusual—it is something to be grateful for, and not taken for granted.

Jesus has begun delivering His great prophetic sermon that we call The Mount Olivet Discourse.

Luke chapter 21, which Pastor Patil read to his congregation in the barn that night, is our text for today.

Now much of Luke 21 parallels Matthew 24 and 25, along with Mark 13.

Jesus is essentially describing the opening of the seven seals in the book of Revelation that takes place in the early part of the tribulation period.

Everything intensifies during the tribulation and, here in Luke 21:10, the Lord describes global war—not local battles or even continental wars that we’ve seen fought throughout human history.

This is *global* war with bloodshed everywhere.

While the earth has experienced earthquakes, here in verse 11, Jesus describes great earthquakes. The Greek word is *mega*, these are mega earthquakes.

Famines and pestilences will also be universal—so intense and horrifying that 1/4th of the world’s population will die because of them. If it were to happen today, 2 billion people would die in a matter of months.

Now Jesus describes what Revelation 6 calls the breaking of the 6th seal of judgment.

At the breaking of the 6th seal, Jesus says here in Luke 21:11, “there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”

The Book of Revelation describes these cosmic disturbances like the sun growing dark and steroid showers hitting the surface of the earth.

We know from history that in 1909, one asteroid struck a sparsely populated area in Siberia; like an atomic bomb, it leveled everything for 700 square miles.

The combined square miles of Cary, Raleigh, Apex, Holly Springs, Morrisville, and Angier is less than 300 square miles.

We can't imagine the carnage and the destruction that Jesus is describing.

There's no defense for this. I thought it was humorous and transparent when a NASA scientist was asked what to do about earth being struck by an asteroid again and he said that the best thing to do about it is "try and not think about it."

With the opening of the 6th seal, and more devastation from the wrath of God, most of the human race will have already concluded that this is the wrath of God.

In fact, John records in **Revelation 6:16** that people will still refuse to repent; they would rather die than repent. John writes, they will be "**calling to the mountains and rocks**":

"Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come."

Revelation 6:16-17

"The wrath of the Lamb has come."

The Greek construction of this phrase doesn't mean they believe the wrath of God has now just arrived with this 6th seal, but that everything up to this point is understood to be the wrath of the Lamb.

In other words, they correctly conclude that everything which has happened up to this point—the bloodshed, the global war, the mega-earthquakes, the famine, the pestilence, now the asteroids—all of it is nothing less than the obvious wrath of God.

Here in Luke 21, Jesus sounds the warning that it's coming, and that warning is now 2,000 years old. Have you listened to it?

What have you personally done about His warning of coming wrath? Have you run to the safety of Christ?

He will save His people from His wrath as He raptures the church ahead of time.

Now with that review, Jesus says here in Luke 21:12:

"But before all this ..."

And this is where we stopped last Lord's Day.

Note that time stamp, “**Before all this**,” signifying that before the rapture of the church and before the unfolding of God’s wrath in the tribulation—before any of this takes place—here’s what you can expect as a Christian, living in these pre-rapture days.

Jesus is now going to describe what believers can expect during their lifetime!

This is what we can expect out of life, and let me tell you ahead of time, Jesus basically gives us a description of 2,000 years of church history up to this very day.

Let me break it down into 6 characteristics for our study.

We can call the first characteristic:

General Persecution

Notice the opening line of verse 12:

“But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, ...”

Luke 21:12a

This is to be your expectation. To “*lay hands on you*” is a reference to being arrested; they want you out of the way. They want your gospel witness silenced.

Dale Davis wrote that the world might occasionally smile at Christians, but on the whole of history, Christians are the objects of raging anger and derision.

Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, [Luke: The Year of our Lord's Favor](#) (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 148

Mockery, ridicule, and hatred. Just as Jesus predicted.

Like Celsus, a philosopher who wrote a book called, “The True Word,” a title which mocked “The Word of God.” His book was the first comprehensive attack published against Christianity. He wrote with open anger and frustration and mockery with these words:

“No one possessed of any culture or wisdom or judgment becomes a Christian; the [Christian’s] aim is to convince only worthless idiots, slaves, poor women and children ... these are the only ones whom they manage to turn into Christians.”

Ibid, p 148

Jesus predicted this kind of anger and mockery—this kind of demonically inspired hatred.

General persecution is what Christians are to expect out of life.

Secondly, we are to expect:

Governmental Prosecution

Notice the middle part of verse 12:

“They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, ...”

Luke 21:12b

This prediction would be more immediate for the early church.

These early Jewish believers would be arrested and handed over to the Jewish leaders; in these days, the local Jewish courts were held in the synagogues.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 475

Imagine how painful it would be to have grown up in that synagogue as a child—in that Jewish community—only to have decided to follow Christ and be taken as a prisoner into that same synagogue where you are judged and then sent to prison.

But this courtroom scene extends well beyond a local synagogue. Jesus goes on to say **here in the last part of verse 12:**

“And you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake.”

Luke 21:12c

In other words, regional leaders will condemn Christians; culture will mock Christians and nations will outlaw Christianity.

Within a few decades of Jesus’ prediction here in **Luke 21**, the Roman emperor will be tying Christians to poles, covering them with tar and setting them on fire to serve as torches for his outdoor parties.

A hundred years later, another Roman emperor will order all copies of Scripture to be burned, all church buildings burned to the ground and every Christian who will not recant to be burned to death as well.

And to this day, 2,000 years later, research organizations estimate that more than 100,000 Christians are martyred every single year—and it’s not slowing down.

Governmental prosecution is alive and well in China, North Korea, Turkey, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Iran, India; all around the world today, there is governmental sanctions, governmental penalties, governmental prosecution, much of leading to life-long prison sentences and even execution.

I read of one event that took place in Afghanistan just this past year. An underground church was meeting. One of the women in that congregation, meeting that night in secret, telephoned a friend whose church had been praying for them. The last words she spoke to this friend were these, “We feel your prayers for us because we all have this supernatural boldness that has come over us; we are singing in tonight, even my children have said to me, ‘Mom, we will not deny Jesus.’” As she said those words, soldiers burst into their meeting, gunshots were heard, and every member of that church was martyred that night.

But imagine, boldness and joyful singing to Christ.

What are we complaining about today? How bad do we think we’ve got it in our country?

Let’s make sure we’re not looking at Scripture through American eyes, but through the eyes of Jesus who said, “This is what you can expect out of life.”

On the timeline of church history, anything other than general persecution and governmental prosecution is unusual.

Now what’s interesting is that after such a prediction, you’d think Jesus would say something encouraging like, “I’m so sorry you’re going to suffer this kind of treatment by being hauled into court unfairly and unjustly.”

Great Opportunity

Instead, Jesus says this here in verse 13:

“This will be your opportunity to bear witness.”

Luke 21:13

Wait a second! What?

“This is going to be a great opportunity to give your testimony.”

General persecution *plus* governmental prosecution *equals* a great opportunity.

The Lord is effectively saying, “Think about it: you’re going to be standing before that judge, or that king or that governor, and you’re going to have a captive audience!

Davis, p. 148

They’re not going to be able to get away. They can’t help but hear what you have to say!

Now don’t miss the fact that Jesus is not promising them an opportunity to vindicate themselves. This has nothing to do with receiving justice on earth; this has to do with testifying about Jesus.

Here's the implication for the believer: God has appointed us to difficulty, and difficulty opens the door of opportunity, opportunity for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

I just finished the new biography of Corrie ten Boom, entitled, "The Watchmaker's Daughter." It's an in depth look at their rescue attempts, their family business, their eventual capture and deportation to concentration camps. Corrie and her sister Betsie endured incredible suffering in those conditions.

Their barrack was packed with hundreds of women, and it was infested with fleas. Corrie complained, but Betsie saw it as a blessing that kept the guards from bothering them at night.

They had been able to smuggle a New Testament into their barrack and it was Betsie again who saw the opportunity of this captive audience—literally—and it wasn't long before they were holding four services a night with these women, and many would respond to the gospel.

Adversity can open the door to opportunity.

Now Jesus anticipated his disciples responding with fear at the thought of standing before kings and governors to give answers in court. They were largely uneducated Galileans.

So, Jesus offers a **fourth characteristic** of life we should expect for disciples; we'll call this one:

God-inspired Testimony

Notice verse 14:

"Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."

Luke 21:14-15

In other words, the disciples will not need to memorize or rehearse some eloquent speech to help them wiggle out of tight situations in the courtroom.

David E. Garland, [Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2011), p. 831

The Lord is promising to give them, at the right moment, the right words to say.

Now, by the way, this isn't an excuse for pastors and Bible teachers to skip studying. This verse doesn't defend some preacher saying, "I don't need to study; I'm just going to depend on God and when I step up to preach, God will give me the words."

God gets blamed for a lot of bad sermons.

This promise from Jesus isn't a promise for preachers or teachers who don't study or who lose their notes.

One Sunday, I was sitting back-stage enjoying the music and singing along, when I realized my Bible wasn't on the little table next to me.

Now, I don't have a photographic memory, by any means. My notes are critical; they contain quotes and illustrations and supporting passages of Scripture; they keep me on track during multiple services.

I looked under my chair and it wasn't there. I looked up on the pulpit and it wasn't there either. This was a serious problem. We were starting the last song.

I immediately contacted our security team and they alerted the ushers—it was all hands on deck! They raced to my pick-up truck, and it wasn't there; they searched backstage where I got my microphone on and it wasn't there; they went into the prayer room—it wasn't there.

By now, the last song was being sung and I was panicking; at this point I couldn't remember my own name. Then we got to the last stanza, no usher in sight. I was praying; I was rededicating my life.

My mind was racing; I didn't want to fumble it; I knew I couldn't fake it—this congregation is too smart for that. Then the song ended. No usher.

I'm walking to the pulpit, I wasn't planning on God filling my mouth, I knew this verse didn't mean that. I was planning on leading the congregation in a very long prayer for every missionary—beginning with the apostle Paul!

But as I approached the pulpit, out of the corner of my eye I saw an usher walking quickly toward me, holding my Bible. I was told later that he'd found it on the counter in the men's room; you probably didn't want to know that!

He came up the stairs and handed it to me in mid-stride—it was a perfect handoff just as I stepped into the pulpit. I heard angels singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

You never knew it. You didn't know that on that Sunday, you came so close to getting out early.

This is not a verse for losing your notes.

What Jesus is promising here is providential insight, not because you *refused* to prepare, but for those moments when you *couldn't* prepare.

Those moments when you're suddenly put on the spot, when a neighbor or coworker asks you a question about your faith, or a family member wants your opinion about some world event or crisis, or your professor or supervisor suddenly asks you a question about Jesus and you have no time to prepare.

Let me tell you what Jesus means: when you don't have time to get ready, God has already been at work getting *you* ready.

When you don't have time to prepare, you will discover that God has prepared you.

Now keep in mind here that Jesus is not promising here that because He gives you something to say, that it's going to set you free. This isn't a free pass out of prison, or even martyrdom.

Jesus doesn't promise to deliver us *out*, in fact, Jesus promises next that we're going to be delivered *up*, and you won't believe by whom.

Verse 16 reveals the fifth characteristic for the lives of disciples; we'll call this one:

Grievous Betrayals

Now verse 16:

"You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake."

Luke 21:16-17

Perhaps you've experienced a fracture in your family because of your faith in Christ; perhaps you've lost close friendships, or a promotion at work. Maybe you're the odd man or woman in the office, you know what it's like to be ridiculed or maybe even outright hated for what you believe.

Adapted from Barton, p. 478

Jesus would say: "That's what I want you to expect out of life."

Now, the Lord concludes His description of church history with number 6:

Guaranteed Victory

Verse 18:

"But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives."

Luke 21:18-19

Jesus isn't suggesting that you're going to earn your way into heaven by suffering. He's simply describing how "suffering will sift genuine Christians from fair-weather believers."

Adapted from Barton, p. 477

There are a lot of people who say they're following Christ, but only if He makes it worth it. Genuine Christians follow Christ because they believe—no matter what—that *He* is worth it.

Now Jesus is promising a future inheritance here in heaven. You might be persecuted, tortured, martyred, but your glorified body will not be missing **one hair**.

Your body will be resurrected, rejoined with your spirit that immediately went to be with the Lord upon your death, and that immortalized, glorified, young, perfected eternal body won't be missing one little hair. ***Some of us are going to get it all back!***

I like the way J.C. Ryle put it when he wrote on this text 150 years ago:

"Whatever a Christian suffers through, the best things cannot be injured; our lives our hid with Christ; our treasure in heaven cannot be taken away; our soul is beyond the reach of harm."

J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke* (Evangelical Press, original pub. 1879; reprint, 1975), p. 330

John Phillips puts it this way: "No matter what you experienced or suffered, you will enter heaven, as it were, unscathed."

John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke* (Kregel, 2005), p. 257

Yes, this is especially encouraging and inspiring to those facing persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom.

But this is the perspective Jesus wants us all to have; this is what we are to expect out of life:

- General persecution
- Governmental prosecution
- Great opportunities
- God-inspired testimonies
- Grievous betrayals
- Guaranteed victory

I close with this testimony of a missionary, a member of a missionary team. Two people on this team were from Cary, North Carolina, although I never met them.

They were a team of Southern Baptist missionaries working in Afghanistan, helping the refugees with humanitarian aid and sharing the gospel with those they helped.

One day while they were traveling down a road, they were ambushed by local militant Muslims and all but one of them were killed.

One of those who died was a 38-year-old California native; she had sensed that this was a dangerous environment, and it might lead to death. She had mailed a handwritten note to her pastor and home church that was to be read, only if she was killed.

It would be read at her funeral. Her letter was written with incredible insight and eternal perspective; it is very convicting and yet perfectly suited for Luke chapter 21.

It read:

“Dear Pastors & church family:

You are reading this letter only in the event of my death.

Thank you for investing in my life and spiritual well-being. Keep raising up fine young pastors. Keep sending missionaries.

When God calls there are no regrets. But I wasn't called to a place. I was called to Him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory is now my reward.”

Sounds like the perfect testimony of someone who would experience victory guaranteed.

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Study Guide

Summary:

In the unfolding narrative of church history, we are reminded that the trials and tribulations faced by believers are not anomalies, but expectations set forth by Christ Himself.

The essence of this teaching is that God has sovereignly orchestrated our difficulties to serve as conduits for gospel proclamation. Jesus anticipates the natural fear that accompanies such daunting circumstances and promises divine eloquence and wisdom to His disciples when they face their accusers, ensuring that their testimony will be irrefutable.

The Lord's assurance does not imply an escape from suffering but rather a preparation for it. Jesus forewarns of betrayals from close relationships, emphasizing that allegiance to Him may cost us dearly in earthly terms. Yet, Jesus promises ultimate victory. He assures us that not a hair of our head will perish and that by enduring, we will gain our lives—an eternal perspective that transcends the temporal suffering.

This sermon draws parallels between the early church's experiences and the ongoing persecution of believers worldwide. It highlights the reality that Christians in many parts of the world, such as India and Afghanistan, continue to face severe opposition for their faith.

Key Takeaways:

- Persecution is not a detour but a divinely appointed path for believers. When we face opposition for our faith, it is not a sign of God's absence but rather a strategic placement for gospel witness. Our trials are not random; they are purposeful, and through them, God's message can reach places and hearts that might otherwise remain closed.
- Betrayal and suffering for the sake of Christ are to be expected, yet they are not the end of our story. The pain of being forsaken by loved ones is real, but it pales in comparison to the eternal victory promised to us. Our earthly losses are investments in an imperishable inheritance, and our faithfulness amidst trials is a testament to the worthiness of Christ.
- The global persecution of Christians is not a relic of the past but a present reality. The church must not become complacent in the face of freedom but should remember and intercede for our brothers and sisters who suffer for the name of Christ. Their courage and steadfastness are a powerful witness to the hope that we have in Jesus.

Discussion Guide:

Bible Reading:

Luke 21:13; Luke 21:14-15; Luke 21:16-19

Observation Questions:

1. In Luke 21:13, what does Jesus say will be the disciples' opportunity?
2. What assurance does Jesus give His followers in Luke 21:14-15 regarding the wisdom and words they will receive?
3. According to Luke 21:16-19, what kinds of hardships do believers face, and what is the promise that Jesus gives them?

Interpretation Questions:

1. How does the concept of persecution as an opportunity to testify change the way believers view trials?
2. What might be the significance of Jesus promising His disciples divine wisdom and words during persecution?
3. In the face of betrayal and hatred mentioned in Luke 21:16-17, how does the promise of not a hair perishing and winning life provide comfort and perspective?

Application Questions:

1. Reflect on a recent difficulty or opposition you faced because of your faith. How can you view this as an opportunity to testify about Christ?
2. Can you think of a situation where you might be called to defend your faith unexpectedly? How can you trust in Jesus' promise to give you the words and wisdom at that moment?
3. Identify a relationship where you have felt betrayed or opposed because of your faith. How can you apply Jesus' encouragement to stand firm in that relationship?
4. Consider the global church and the persecution many believers face. What is one practical step you can take this week to support and remember your brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering?
5. Reflect on the eternal victory promised in Luke 21:18-19. How does this assurance affect the way you endure current trials and hardships?