

## **Even So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come**

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November 17, 2019. Pastor Stephanie reminds us today that this world is filled with challenges to our faith and troubling circumstances that we must endure. And at the same time, we are sure that Christ is very near to us and provides us with what we need, in order to endure to the end with him.

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

Grace and peace to each one of you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Six years ago today, my husband and I were returning from a two-week trip to the Holy Land to Israel, where we saw sites that we heard about since we were children, and we met people whose life situations we tried to understand as we interacted with several groups. It is a troubled land as you know, and yet it was a marvelous trip. One of the places most indelibly imprinted on my memory is Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The view from Temple Mount allows one to gaze across the Kidron Valley and see Bethany, where Jesus stayed with his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. There are so many biblical scenes that one can envision by standing in that place. Another one is being able to see the "lay of the land" as you imagine Jesus making his way on the donkey with the procession into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. When you stand on Temple Mount today, you stand on the foundation from centuries ago. The temple from Jesus' day was destroyed in 70 AD, but the foundational stones are something to still behold. As we stood at the corner where two massive walls met, we felt like miniatures compared to each of the massive building blocks that comprise the walls. The architectural wonder of how so many of those massive stones could have been built on top of one another in a time without heavy machinery is simply astounding. It was no wonder that those who saw the temple, as described in the Gospel of Luke, were quite impressed by it.

Our gospel reading today opens with Luke telling us that some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus does not share their admiration for it. What they see and what he sees are two quite different things. They see the big and impressive, the same kinds of things that we see in our world: bigger than life things, impressive feats of construction, or works of human hands that capture us. Those are the things that get our notice. It's completely understandable to me that Jesus' disciples would have been admiring the stones of this mighty temple. They were a magnificent display of human ingenuity and dedication. Think of how frequently we too are wowed by large and beautiful, or complex works of architectural design that we have seen. They do inspire our admiration and our respect. We love the places that give testimony to power and prestige. Those are the things that get featured in magazine articles, and top billing in headline news stories. But Jesus saw that same building that they admired so greatly, and he saw it quite differently. He saw a show place that was built by the proud tyrant King Herod, who exploited people. He was not impressed with the structural integrity of the building, because there was no integrity to the man who wanted all the glory for having built it, nor was there integrity in the way it had come to be used by the religious establishment.

In the chapter prior to the one we read today, Jesus describes the abuses of the religious establishment that had gone on in the temple. The leaders, he says, have devoured widows' houses, and for a show make lengthy prayers. No, Jesus is not impressed. So he says to those around him that the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another. All will be thrown down in this temple that so enamors you. And just when those around him think he must be having a really bad day, he goes on to

describe some more disturbing circumstances that they can expect to experience. He tells them that false teachers will appear who will try to lead them astray. Some will even claim to be operating in his name, but they are not to be followed. Nation will rise against nation. Kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes, famines, and plagues. It's really quite a depressing scene that he portrays. And then it gets worse. He goes on to say his followers will be persecuted and experience real hardship. None of this is what you would put in a brochure inviting people to come to church to experience what it means to follow Christ. If that is what is part of the bargain, that doesn't sell particularly well.

But I've come to see that Jesus is drawing a dramatic picture of the kind of world we already live in, and he helps us to see that what initially looks good to us is not at all what it many times seems to be. Things that are not built up and operating according to God's intentions have a short shelf life in God's scheme of things. Nations, kingdoms, people who are not built on the foundation of God's truth and love will continually cause upheaval, for their integrity is not sound. They will try to put on an impressive show, but they only carry it off for so long before they crumble under the weight of their own pomposity and self-aggrandizement. Better to not be impressed or swayed by them. In fact, I think Jesus is reminding us to make sure that we have our feet firmly planted with him. In face of all the difficulties we'll face, Jesus wants us to see the opportunity embedded with them, because with him there is always good news woven into life. Jesus says that when we see these troublesome situations, we have an opportunity to testify to God's presence and love. To speak of what is really real. To bear witness to the hope that we have in Christ. To mention that his presence never leaves nor forsakes us, and to talk about the peace that we can experience that passes all understanding. Remembering and sharing instances of where we have been adrift and have found the everlasting arms of God to be more than sufficient in holding us up.

Challenges for those in Christ reveal that we do stand on a firm foundation, and never does that foundation reveal its true integrity more than when we are going through troubled times. Jesus says we don't need to be concerned about what we will say when we were up against troubles. He will be right there with us, giving the words to say with wisdom that will baffle opponents and surprise even us.

Paul Manz, whose gifts of music are enriching our worship today, is best known for the song that the choir will sing during the offertory. The name, as you see it printed, is "E'en so, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come." I understand that it was written when Paul was in anguish over the critical health condition of his young son. When circumstances around him were swirling, he found his true foundation in the promises of Christ. This piece expresses his desire to have the presence of Jesus come quickly to give him aid.

The testimony of faith that is called forth from each of us is to know on whom to call when storm clouds of trouble surround us. We cannot and need not make this journey of life on our own strength. We are not strong enough to withstand and prevail when turbulence comes. Out of the troubling news that we are unable comes the good news of the gospel, that Christ is more than able to deal with all that comes our way. He is more than willing to come near to us, to give us his comfort, hope, and peace. He is capable of quelling the storms or giving us peace, so that we might endure through them.

Now the lectionary has set us up in these weeks, from All Saints' Day, through next week when we will observe Christ the King Sunday. There's a very special purpose, it seems, bound up in these weeks of readings. We get to deal with the contrast between what our broken world has to offer, and the life that is abundant in Christ. Of course we are sobered, as we mentioned on All Saints' Day, by the loss of our loved ones. At the same time, we are able to rejoice that they live because God is not the god of the dead, but of the living. All are alive in him.

We are reminded daily that this world is filled with challenges to our faith and troubling circumstances that we must endure. And at the same time, we are sure that Christ is very near to us and provides us with what we need, in order to endure to the end with him. There is no triumphalism here. There is no way to go along with "live your best life if you follow these six easy principles," as some try to promise. No glitzy religious promises based on wishful thinking here. Just the raw truth, that troubles and challenges in this life are very real, and they come to all people. The faithful experience them just as fully as everyone else.

But in the midst of it all, the one whose structural integrity is intact is with us. Temples may be destroyed, but God will never be destroyed. Neither will God's people ever be destroyed. Some may betray us, but God will hold us up and give us what we need to be able to, once again, sing a new song as we are exhorted to do in Psalm 98. So let us sing with gusto. Let us praise God for his faithfulness. Let us testify to God's goodness while we have breath. Our hymn of the day probably says, better than anything I've said today, to speak to God's faithful presence even in the midst of challenging circumstances. I invite you to join me as we offer our songs of praise to our God. Please stand as you are able as we sing...

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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