

Dismantling the Robber's Den

Luke 21:6-7

February 25, 2024

Turn in your bibles to Luke 21, Luke 21, which is the Olivet Discourse and it is an amazing chapter of teaching and it's also, just want to point this out, that it is, it's the final discourse in Luke's Gospel. The final discourse of Jesus' teaching; a full section of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Luke. So it's, it's, fitting that the last extended teaching before the cross is about, last things. He's looking to the future. He's looking far beyond his cross, far beyond his resurrection, his ascension, and he's looking to his return.

I love that perspective, that Jesus has just a couple of days before the cross. He sees right through the cross. He endured the cross, despising the shame, and he did that "for the joy that was set before him." So, he looks far beyond to see the victory of God, in his ministry and in his work. Well, we have

only just entered the chapter last week and we got an overview, saw the major divisions of this discourse and then after that, we tried to imagine what the disciples were seeing on this particular day; how they left Jerusalem and then descended into the Kidron Valley, and they were under the massive shadow that was cast by this massive temple, just to their west. They're on, they're coming up the Mount of Olives on the east, and the massive shadow is cast, by the sun setting in the west, on them as they cross over the Kidron Valley and then go up the Mount of Olives on the other side. And as they headed up the other side, with a little more distance, and as the view of Jerusalem and the temple in particular, this massive edifice comes into a panoramic view, that visual perspective that hit them, evoked their admiration, these great stones and costly offerings.

And that's what we see in Luke 21, verse 5. While some were talking about the temple, that it had been adorned with beautiful stones or noble stones, massive stones, but also beautiful stones, as we talked about last time, with marble and such. And, also, the dedicated gifts or the, the, votive offerings, the offerings made accompanying a vow in the temple,

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some costly offerings that decorated the temple and adorned the temple.

And as they're talking about this temple, and all of its beauty, and all of its magnificence, he said, Jesus said, verse 6, "As for these things which you're looking at, days will come in which there will not be one stone upon another which will not be torn down." Such divergent ways of thinking, such different perspectives, same sight, same view, totally different ways of thinking, between the disciples and, what, how Jesus is thinking. And what I'd like to do today, as we continue setting up this study on the Olivet Discourse, is to get a, a, greater appreciation for how the disciples were thinking, to understand a little bit better their mindset, so that we can see how Jesus wanted them to think.

As we head into this discourse, Jesus is not just in the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21, or Matthew 24, Matthew 13; all of them kind of parallel accounts are covering the same ground. He's not just answering questions here about eschatology. This is not just a discourse, or a, a teaching, an instruction like a

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classroom instruction on eschatology. He's not just satisfying their curiosities about the future. As always, Jesus is intentional in what he says. He's always teaching, and He's teaching so that he can influence their thinking. And He's influencing their thinking to change their mindset, so that the disciples walk rightly before God; so that they have right thinking and right behavior. All of this has to change the way they live; change the way they think.

So, the disciples' questions, may be the occasion, for the Olivet Discourse, but the Lords' aim in teaching, his purpose in the Olivet Discourse, is to change their thinking and change their behavior. So, we're going to start with the disciples and try to get into their heads a little bit. Try to think like some 1st century Jews, together. We're Gentiles, were separated by 2000 years of history. We're separate. We're on the other side of the planet. A lot of time has passed, a lot of distance, dis, different culture, different language and all that.

We're going to try to get into the heads of some 1st century Jews, believing Jews, their mentality. These disciples, their

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mentality, their sense of identity, their significance, their sense of meaning, their sense of worth; we need to understand upfront that it is radically different than ours. Radically different than the modern mind, for whom the, especially here in our country, for whom the individual, and individual thinking, and individual will, and individual ambition, all of that counts for everything in our time, not for them.

These disciples are Jewish men, and their Jewishness is the most important thing about them. They are institutional men and the institution that mattered most to them, that would shape their identity, that which gave them a sense of meaning and significance and purpose in life, had nothing to do with them as individuals. It had to do with what they were a part of. It was the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem that really was the symbol of their identity. It was the institution that mattered most.

So let's start with this. If you'd like to take notes, you can jot this down, number one: The Institution of Israel's Religion. The Institution of Israel's Religion. The temple is the symbol of the institution of Israel's religion. The temple, this

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magnificent building is the symbol of its religion. It is its most important institution. The temple is central to Israel's identity, central to Jewish culture. It is the symbol of God's presence, of God's favor. According to one source, "The Holy Temple unifies the Jewish people and serves as the center of government, culture, and communal life. Like blood flows to the heart and is revitalized and pumped back into the body. The people of Israel came to the temple three times a year to receive God's blessing and return home refreshed and invigorated. When the temple is standing, the Divine Presence, the Shekinah is fully revealed." End Quote.

That's a sentiment that is shared by Israel. And, and, I, I, like that imagery of it being the heart of Israel. It's where the blood flows. It's where blood goes to get oxygenated and then go back out into, the, through the arteries, into Israel and into the rest of Israel as a, as a, community, as a body, as a people; to feed the rest of the land. And that's a great imagery, and that sentiment goes all the way back to Moses. After God brought the people out of Egypt, after he'd destroyed the reigning superpower of the world, and humiliated Egypt's gods, people came to Sinai.

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Having come through the Red Sea, they came to Sinai. And we remember, disappointing incident of the idolatrous golden calf. Shocking really, after all that God had done for them, after his manifest presence, his power, after the receiving of the ten commandments and all that happened, Israel's unfaithfulness led to an existential crisis in Israel, and I mean existential. Are they going to continue to exist? God said I'm going to destroy them, Moses, and start over with you. He pleaded. You remember, he acted as mediator. He pleaded with God. Please, don't do this. You've made these promises. What will the nations say? He was able to deliver them out, but he couldn't bring them into the land.

So God is not needing to be convinced, you know, he is God. He's doing what he's doing. But he is evoking from Moses this mediatorial role, this prayer, and in and through the prayers of Moses he answers and he says, I won't destroy this people and start over with you. But God did tell Moses in Exodus 33:3, he said, "Go up to the land that I swore to give to you." I'm going to continue the program. I'm going to bring you into the promised land. Go on up. But he says in Exodus 33:3, "I will not

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go up in your midst before you, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way." This peoples in danger, if I go with you.

Moses responded to him, "If your presence doesn't go with us, do not lead us up from here." Like let's just stop the program right now. "Indeed, how then can it be known that I found favor in Your sight, I and your people? Is it not by Your going with us so, that we, I, and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are on the face of the earth?" It's you that makes this people, not the people; not, not, even leaving Egypt, not even coming into the promised land, not even all the promises being fulfilled, if you're not there, if you're not among us, it's all for naught. It is no small thanks to the gift of Moses and his leadership to Israel, thanks to this mediatorial prayer of his, that God granted his request.

God stayed with the people, and in fact God gave them, as we see in the rest of the Book of Exodus, God gave them the tabernacle; all the accoutrements of worship, all that would facilitate the worship of God through the tabernacle. He gave

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them the sacrificial system. He gave them commands about the annual feasts, everything that would, that would, keep them together, keep God at the center of their life and their thinking, God at the center of their calendar, God at the center of their priorities. The physical, tangible representation of God's abiding presence, his favor, and his atonement, that protected them from his own wrath is the tabernacle and then later the temple.

This is why the disciples, all of them Jewish men, men who love their nation, history, heritage, all them being Jewish; faithful Jews, at the center of their thinking, their very identity, all the culture that they brought their kids up in; it was the presence of God and his favor, it was symbolized by the temple, and then institutionalized in the tabernacle and temple worship. I'm not going to have you turn to all the passages that we could turn to, but remember how God descended upon the tabernacle at the end of Exodus. How God descended upon the tabernacle and then later during Solomon's reign, God descended upon the temple that Solomon had built. He came in visible form in the Shekinah glory of God.

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The gift of God's abiding presence was housed there, so to speak, in the temple. It was an ever-present reminder that they belong to God. They were set apart by God. They were specially chosen by God. And this is why it was so devastating then, when the glory of God departed from the temple in judgement; finally forsaking the people whose sin had become so severe, so deep, so prevalent, so pervasive, that God's visible presence could no longer remain. He could no longer keep his reputation of holiness and be joined to this people. So God, just before the exile, showed Ezekiel in a very dramatic fashion, showed him the glory of the Lord leaving the temple that Solomon had built.

Ezekiel 10:18, Glory of the Lord leaves the temple, goes up from the temple and departs. Next chapter Ezekiel 11:23, "The glory of Yahweh went out from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city." What's the mountain east, directly east of the city, of the temple? The Mount of Olives. Same mountain. We remember, God sent, had sent the Assyrians and, in Ezekiel's day, God sent the Babylonians to judge Israel. Israel, to drag the people away in exile.

God banished them from the land for their unfaithfulness for their idolatry. And then after 70 years of captivity, remember, God was gracious, he called an end to their exile. He sent the Jews back to the land, and there was a small remnant under Ezra and Nehemiah that returned to the land and started to rebuild the temple. Rebuild Jerusalem. Set up its walls. And ever since Ezra and Nehemiah, and under Zerubbabel and Joshua, two leaders who oversaw the rebuilding of the temple, ever since that time, in this, what we call the second temple; you will search the Scripture in vain to find where the glory of the Lord return to that second temple. You don't find it. What you will find is a promise of a future glory, a time when God's presence will return. It's not now. It's not at the rebuilding of the second temple, but it's sometime in the future.

Listen to this from the post Exilic prophet Haggai. Haggai and Zechariah were two prophets that need to come to the people, as they're trying to rebuild, and encourage them in the work. They'd stopped working. They'd start working on their own houses and doing their own stuff and God said, whoa, time out. What's most important, your house or mine? What's most important to your community? Your sense of community, your schooling, all the

things you guys do together? Or is it the temple of God in your midst? Is it my abiding presence? Get your priorities straight.

He sends Haggai, Zechariah to the people, to command them to continue rebuilding. And they do. They do. They rebuild. They finish the temple. And in the prophecy of Haggai, in particular chapter 2, verses 4 to 9, they get a word about the future glory that they hope for, they long for. “‘But now be strong Zerubbabel;’ declares Yahweh, ‘be strong also, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land, be strong,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares Yahweh of hosts.

“And ‘as for the promise which I cut with you when you came out of Egypt,’ as to that covenant I cut with you when you came out of Egypt, ‘My spirit is standing in your midst; do not fear!’ For thus says the Yahweh of hosts, ‘Once more- in a little while- I'm going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and also the dry land. And I will shake all the nations; they will come with the desirable things of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says Yahweh of hosts. ‘The silver is

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Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares Yahweh of Hosts. And, 'the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says Yahweh of Hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares Yahweh of Hosts."

The elements of that remarkable prophecy which Haggai delivered in 520 BC, it had yet to be fulfilled in Jesus' day. It had an appearance of being fulfilled, and this is what the disciples are hoping in; look at the glory of this place. There's a, there's a, Babylonian curtain donated to the, some of the wealth of the nations is coming to us. Look at the gold. Look at the marble. They're wondering. Is it now? Is it happening? Filling the temple with glory; a latter glory that's greater than the former. Oh, the wealth of the nations is one thing. Gold and silver is one thing. That's glory of all the certain level. But what would exceed the former glory, without the abiding Shekinah glory of God; the presence of God there. Gold and silver is just metal, marble is just rocks, without the glory of the Lord, it is nothing.

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So the Jews along with the disciples of Jesus, they're waiting for the fulfillment of this promise. And Haggai, he's not the only one to speak of a future temple, not the only one to speak of a future glory. Turn back to the Book of Ezekiel. Turn to the Book of Ezekiel, because Haggai's prophecy is connected to Ezekiel's prophecy. And Ezekiel had delivered this prophecy to the Exiles living in Babylon about 50 years earlier. God gave these prophecies of Israel's future. He spoke the promises that instilled hope of a national restoration and promises, yes, of a future temple.

Let's start in Ezekiel 36. Ezekiel 36 and just read a few passages, just so you get the, the, sense of all that God intends to accomplish for Israel as a nation, Ezekiel 30. So obviously we find ourselves in Ezekiel 36, as well, because there are new covenant promises that we have partaken of. Listen to this, though, starting in, verse thir, chapter 36, verse 22. "Therefore say to the House of Israel, 'Thus says Lord Yahweh, "It is not for your sake, O House of Israel, that I'm about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you have come.

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"I will prove the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. And then the nations will know that I am Yahweh," declares the Lord Yahweh, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. And I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your idols.

"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." And "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, you will be very careful to do my judgments. And you will inhabit the land that I gave to your father; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring famine upon you.

"I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field so that you will not receive again the reproach of famine

among the nations. And then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves to your own faces for your iniquities and your abominations. I'm not doing this for your sake," declares the Lord Yahweh, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and feel dishonor for your ways, O House of Israel!"

"Thus says the Lord Yahweh, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, the waste places to be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the Garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate, and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.' Then the nations that remain all around you will know that I, Yahweh, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, Yahweh, have spoken and will do it."

After that promise, notice it's very physical in nature, isn't it? Cities, grain, fruit, the desolation of the land replaced by cultivation of the land, productivity of the land, so much so

that it becomes like the Garden of Eden. Has that ever happened since this prophecy, until the present moment? It has not. But after that promise, we read more restoration prophecies in Ezekiel chapter 37, National resurrection is pictured as a valley of dry bones. But then when God's spirit blows upon the dry bones, these bones come back to life, becoming a mighty army. He fills them with the breath of God, gives them sinews connecting bone to bone, gives them flesh to cover them. All of this being a metaphor, a picture of Israel as a people. They were dead. They were dry. They're baking in the sun. There's no hope for resurrection for them. And yet, verse 10, Ezekiel 37, "They came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army."

In the latter half of the chapter of thir, chapter 37, God promises to reunify the nation of Israel. They, they were, they were separated ever since Solomon's reign. Ever since, right after Solomon's reign, under Rehoboam and Jeroboam, they'd split. It was hopeless to see their coming together again and yet we see God promising to reunify the nation of Israel like these two sticks that he has Ezekiel joining together.

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And look at Ezekiel 37, verse 21 and following. "Speak to them, says the Lord. Speak to them, 'thus says the Lord Yahweh, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they've gone. I'll gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They also will no longer defile themselves of their idols or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will save them from all their places of habitation in which they've sinned, and I will cleanse them. And they will be my people, and I will be their God.

"And my servant David will be king over them. They will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My judgments and keep My statutes, and do them. They will inhabit the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, which your fathers inhabited; and they will inhabit it, they and their sons and their sons' sons, forever. And David my servant, will be," Prince, "their Prince forever. And I will cut a covenant of peace with them; It'll be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will give them the land

and multiply them and will set my sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And the nations will know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."'"

Notice the promise of God's presence among them, and it's a separate promise from him putting his sanctuary in their midst. There is, once again, a recognized, unified nation of Israel and a land; and the mountains of Israel, God's dwelling place, once again in their midst; visible, able to be witnessed and visited by all the nations. And we'll skip over the Gog Magog invasion, which is fascinating, but we don't have time for it.

We'll come to the 40th chapter of Ezekiel and the vision of another temple. And don't miss the fact, that in chapters 40 to 43, God wanted Ezekiel to measure the temple. He wanted to measure it. The verb *māḏaq* to measure, to survey, used 30 times in these few chapters, not including the noun form, by the way, the verb measure, measure, measure, measure, measure, measure, and then actual measurements coming out. Obviously, God wanted

Ezekiel to report the dimensions of the temple to Israel. Ezekiel 40, verse 4, says. He wanted Ezekiel to take these measurements that he's received in this vision of this angelic surveyor. And he wants Ezekiel to write it down and to give them normal human measurements, ones that the people would readily understand, so they can understand the grandeur of this great temple that is coming in the future.

The dimensions of this temple, by the way, three or four times the size of Herod's temple. So we're looking at Herod's temple and wow. But man, the size of this is three to four times that size. It's huge. It's not so huge, though, that we wonder if this is figurative language. Is this just a big metaphor, you know, some kind of figurative language, and we're not really meant to take this literally. No. Measure, measure, measure. Here's some measurements. Here's some measurements. Here's some measurements. Oh, these are all measurements I can understand.

Here's the temple. It's huge. The plain sense is these are normal measures, normal measurements in common use and they're not figures of speech and then look at Ezekiel 43, chapter 43

and verse 1, then he, his angelic tour guide, "He led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east;" here it is, "behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. And it was like the appearance of the vision which I saw," like the vision which I saw, "when He came to bring the city to ruin. And the visions were like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of Yahweh came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east.

"And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house. Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me. He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the souls of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever."

The voice of God, which Ezekiel heard coming from the midst of the temple, said to him, verse 10, "As for you, Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be

ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan." End of verse 11, "Write it in their sight so that they may observe its whole design." Its whole design; with that brief overview in mind, let's go back now to Luke 21, once again.

Actually, you can quickly just go to Luke 19, Luke 19, and verse 41, because the disciples have all of this in their culture. All this is learned from their history, all this is kind of in the flow of their life, and they're thinking, this is what they're thinking about. And they have all that in mind. When Jesus has wept over the city of Jerusalem. Here it appears, as they have gone with Jesus on his coronation procession, coming down from the east, as Ezekiel's prophecy says, and as he rides on a, a, colt, the foal of a donkey; as he rides down into the Kidron Valley and up the other side, they're thinking about the glory of the Lord returning. They're thinking about this prophecy being fulfilled. They've got great expectation of restoration in their minds. And yet Jesus weeps over the city. What gives?

Look at verse 41, chapter 19, he said "The days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and

surround you, hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation." They heard that. They heard him say that. They're close to him as he's making his way through the thousands that are thronging him, that are all the excitement of the day. And especially, as Jesus comes into the temple and clears out the temple, after he's reasserted the purpose of this, by teaching there, setting up his ministry there.

Well, it's not hard to see how the disciples move past that earlier word of foreboding and thought about a brighter future for the temple. Who knows how they interpreted exactly, but Jesus doesn't stop there. He returns to the doom and gloom. Matthew 23:37, he clears the temple. He's confronted by all the different authorities of the temple, challenging his authority to do what he did in the temple. And in Matthew 23:37, he sounds the same word of foreboding, this gloom and, doom and gloom about the future. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kills the prophets and stone those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers chicks under

her wings. But you were unwilling. Behold, your house is left to you desolate!"

Again, the, the, disciples hear this. It's startling to them, especially since things seem to be going so well. Everybody's coming to hear his teaching. So this is startling, again, as Jesus pronounces this desolation. But is it certain? Maybe. Maybe, it's not certain. Maybe there's some hope. Maybe it's a, maybe it's a temporary judgement and then a final reprieve. It's hard to believe. A view of the temple's size, which is imposing. In view of the temple's great beauty, which is stunning. A view of its immense wealth, it's humanly impossible for these Jews, at this time, to imagine the temples full desolation, to see how that fits in the plan.

By all human estimation, it seemed to the disciples that God had blessed Israel. They in some sense reunited the tribes of Israel, allowing them to rebuild their temple. Surely this signified his approvals. Surely it pointed to the coming restoration. Now the Messiah's here. How can the consummation,

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consummation of all of God's promises not be right around the corner?

So the disciples point out, Matthew 24:1, the buildings of the temple. In Luke 21:5, as we've read, they're talking about how the temple's adorned with noble stones and offerings, and one of them in their midst, in Mark 31:3, "one says, teacher, behold what wonderful stones, what beautiful buildings." And what they didn't see clearly is how God saw the temple. What they didn't see clearly is how God, how God saw them in the temple. How God saw their hearts. How God saw their actions. How God saw their priorities. How God saw their thinking. What they didn't see clearly is how Jesus saw it. "For God sees not as man sees, For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

There are some of us today who need to hear this caution as well, don't we? What God sees in unfaithful churches that profess Christ, in unfaithful people who profess his name, in unfaithful parachurch organizations, that claim to do his work, claim to go out to the nations and bring the gospel, claim to be

doing gospel work in other foreign lands. Some of these people, aren't they in our families, relatives of ours. God sees all of this, and what he sees, he condemns. He doesn't excuse. He doesn't overlook. He notes it all. What God justifies, let no man condemn. But the converse is also true. What God condemns, let no man justify.

If we're to be faithful to God, we cannot tolerate what God condemns. We, we, cannot overlook the unfaithfulness to Scripture in the name, especially with many churches today and many organizations today, that claim to be Christian; we can't overlook their unfaithfulness to Scripture, in the name of innovation, adjusting to a new world, communicating in the form of the people, setting aside what the Scripture says to make it more relevant. No. If we're going to be faithful, we must confront, as Jesus is confronting. This is how Jesus disciples need to think.

Beloved, this is how we need to think as well. It forces us into hard conversations with people that we love and care about. It makes the, the, dinner table sometimes awkward. It makes our

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time together with people, sometimes, a little difficult. But Jesus is the only one speaking the things he's speaking; on this occasion, even his own disciples are moving in the direction of the rest of the Jews, and he has to stop them cold. He has to say halt, stop.

This brings us to point number two. What is it that Jesus has seen? Number two: The corruption of Israel's religion. The corruption of Israel's religion. We saw in Luke, and this is similar to Mark, but we saw in Luke, how he introduces the Olivet Discourse by portraying the depth of the corruption of the Jewish leadership and Jewish worship, which is at the heart of the temple in Jerusalem. And Luke and Mark both record the same picture, this, this one that is easily missed in the hustle and bustle of the daily temple activity. But it's a picture that the Lord sees very clearly and we've studied this.

Jesus saw the corruption of Israel's religion, which had come to define this institution, symbolized by the temple. He saw that the temple worship had become superficial and hollow. It is really all form and no substance. He saw the temple leaders were

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inveterate, incurable, hypocrites; all show no reality. The temple institution had been overtaken by robbers and there was an institutionalized form of robbery at work there, that abused the weak and took advantage of the vulnerable. And that's what Jesus is seeing.

He's seeing the systemic failure. The systemic corruption of this temple and how it facilitates a sanitized form of robbery; taking the last two coins of a destitute widow and no one even notices. No one bothers to care. I mean, there's a priest. There's a priest who is a minister of God's mercy, administer of his justice, standing there, stationed at the treasury. He's attending that offering box that the widow approaches, the one that swallowed up her two small copper coins. He's standing there and instead of being a minister to her in her need, he's more like a tax collector. He's there to facilitate the collection of money, not to administer justice and mercy of God.

To her, the temple has become wholly a den of robbers, and even at this point in Jesus' career, after all, he's taught, after the example that he set, in the Ministry of Mercy he's been

engaged in, as he's healing the sick, casting out demons, delivering captives, after all the confrontations he's just had with the Jewish leaders, still, the disciples do not discern the systemic corruption that's infected the temple; how deep and thorough the rottenness of the national religion has become. They don't.

They don't get it like he gets it. They don't see it like he sees it. And how, how common is that to us in our condition? We don't see things like God does. I can tell you, beloved, the more saturated we are in Scripture, the more the mind of God is in our mind, and the more we see it, like he sees it. So be about your Bible reading and prayer. Be about your devotion to his Word. Let his Word course through you as, as, as, Paul says to the Colossians. "Let it dwell in you richly." Richly. You got to think like God thinks. You got to see things as Jesus sees them, and you won't do that if you're absent from the Word.

I want you, at this point, to turn to Matthew 23. Matthew 23, because we need to see how desperate the situation is from Jesus' perspective. And this is something that we actually

covered, but in a very abbreviated form, because that's how Luke covered it, in an abbreviated form, in Luke 20, verses 45 to 47. Matthew 23 is the full indictment of Israel's leadership, which Luke only summarized in Luke 20 verse 46. We're going to take a pause for a moment, because we really need to see how Jesus is seeing things. We really need to see how, see, he sees it so we understand what he's trying to do with his disciples and what he wants to do with us in our thinking.

Look at Matthew 23, starting in verse 1, "Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying this: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and keep, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and don't do them. And they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a little finger. They do all their deeds to be noticed by men; do they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honored banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the marketplaces, and being called rabbi by men."

Well, that's all summarized in Luke 20, verses 46 and 47. But here in Matthew 23, we see the expanded version, and we see, according to Matthew's purpose, that Jesus actually said a lot more on that occasion. He had a lot to say. He was, in fact, at this point, he's just getting started. Skip down to verse 13. He's got woes to pronounce on the leadership. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; and therefore you will receive greater condemnation."

You may notice in some of your Bibles that that verse is missing. It's because none of the translation committees recognize that that verse is actually not in a lot of the earlier manuscripts. It may have been added by an editor later on to make a, kind of join up, with what is said in Luke 20 or Luke 21 or Luke 20, I should say into Luke 20. But verse 15, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes a

proselyte, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." You've got bad discipleship, bad discipleship.

These are the leaders. These are the leaders over the people. If they're discipling the people and all their disciples turn out to be twice the sons of hell that the leaders are. Listen when Jesus condemns, in Matthew 23 and in Luke 20, verses 45 to 47, when he condemns the leaders, he's spreading that across the whole nation. The disciples of these leaders, those who are listening to these, that's all the people. All the people that are crying, hosanna, hosanna. All the people that are cheering him as he's coming into Jerusalem; he's sees, he's got their measure exactly.

This reminds me of what Jesus said to Nicodemus, in John chapter 3, "Are you the teacher of Israel and you do not understand these things?" I mean, I'm talking A,B,C's of regeneration here, and you don't get it. Nicodemus, if you're the teacher of Israel and you don't understand these things, well, what becomes of all of Israel listening to your teaching; if you're at the helm, man, that ship is lost at sea. Jesus said

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of the Pharisees and the scribes in Matthew 15:14, "If a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." Jesus expands that into a principle in Luke 6:39 and 40. "A blind man cannot lead a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he's been fully trained, will be like his teacher."

Folks, again, just a little footnote here. Think about your relatives who are going to bad churches with bad preachers who are not qualified. They're not qualified according to Scripture. They're not gifted to handle the word of God. They know nothing about the word of God. They just get up there and coach people in principles that they get off the Internet; stuff they grab from other websites. They get up and present a Ted talk.

Do not be comforted that your loved ones are spending time with that pastor. He's a blind guide, and anybody who follows a blind guide is himself or herself also blind. Rescue your perishing loved ones. Speak to them. Be loving. Confront them. Be gentle, but don't, don't neglect to tell them the truth. It is not a comfort to you when they're going to some crummy church and

listening to some flashy pastor soothing their ears. All right, that's the end of the footnote.

This is what Jesus is seeing. He is incensed by the corruption and the leadership, and the corruption of the disciples; that's, the, in their discipleship that's producing twice as much of the sons of hell as they are. The people will not, and they cannot rise above the level of their leadership. They're stuck. They are off the rails. They're going over a Cliff. Look again at the text starting in verse 16. Jesus exposes the sham of their apparent reverence for the temple. "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'whoever swears by the,' sancua, 'sanctuary, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is obligated.' You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctified the gold? 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it,' Oh, 'he's obligated.' You blind men, which is more important, the offering, of the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears by *both* the altar and everything on it. And whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears *both* by the sanctuary and by Him who dwells in it. Whoever swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God

and by Him who sits upon it." That is to say, the reverence that they were showing for the temple was actually a reverence for gold and stuff. That's where their hearts were. But still, by evoking the gold of the sanctuary and the offering on the altar, the scribes and the Pharisees were invoking God's name, and thus they took his name in vain. These are spiritual leaders who routinely, as a matter of habit, are taking God's name in vain. It's, it's, just their ministries, is to take God's name in vain.

I'm telling you as I look around at the preaching that I find in our town, in our city, in our region, across our state, across our country, so much of the popular preaching out there is just a repetition of taking God's name in vain; speak his name. They, they, they deny him with their works. They deny him with their form of ministry. They deny him with how they do their church.

Verses, I said I was done with that, but I'm not done with it; I'm still fired up. Sorry about that. Right. Verses 23 to 28, Jesus continues to expose the hypocrisy. He cites evidence of

corruption in the leadership; more and more evidence of corruption, but skip to verse 29, because in this section Jesus reveals just how, just how, bad the situation is; how intractable the situation is. "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets. You adorn the monuments of the righteous and say, well, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with him in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.'" And "so you bear witness against yourselves, as you're sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of Vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?"

He's speaking strongly to them like this, because he loves them. He wants to get their attention, to awaken them from their spiritual death, a slumber of death. Grab their attention and say listen to me, how is it that they say, if we'd been living in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have been partners with him in shedding blood? And then Jesus says, Oh yeah, you are. It's because they're not accepting the testimony of John the Baptist or Jesus himself. In just a few days, they're going to seal that testimony; their, their, own rejection of John the

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Baptist and Jesus himself. They'll seal it by killing him on a cross. He knows their measure. He knows what's going on. The situation here is hopeless.

As sons of the murders of the prophets, the spiritual leaders are characterized by that same hard heartedness. They refuse to repent when God, in his mercy, sends prophets to confront them. They refuse to listen. They ignore the message and they kill the messengers; because of this stubborn disobedience, God calls time. Judgment is coming. Look at verses 34 to 36, "on account of this," like, directly coming out of what I just said, "On account of this, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from city to city." That's sounding very Olivet Discoursish, isn't it? Yes, it is.

He says at first, in fact, to them, right here in the temple, says it to the leaders, "Some of them you'll kill and crucify. Some of them you'll flog in your synagogues, persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the

righteous blood shed on earth from the blood of righteous Abel." That's the first book in the Hebrew Canon of Scripture, "from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berekiah." That's the final book in the Hebrew Canon of Scripture.

So, from basically Genesis to Revelation, in the Hebrew mind, "all the blood of the righteous Abel, blood of Zechariah, son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation." Basically, they'll come upon you. Jesus had come as God's Messiah on a mission of mercy to proclaim the salvation that had been declared and sealed in blood ever since Abel, all the way through the Old Testament to Zechariah, the son of Berekiah.

All of those prophetic ministries pointed to what Jesus was doing in his time. And these Jewish leaders who, represent the entire character of this generation, they were unwilling. They did not want this man to rule over them. And so, Israel will not

see its Messiah again until the nation repents and says,
"blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Now it's after Jesus clears straightforward indictment of the Jewish leadership. It's after Jesus' lament over Jerusalem and its leadership. It's after this promise of desolation. This happens immediately before the incident that Luke records about the practical consequences of bad religion, which is stealing from widows. It's all right here between Matthew 23:39 and 24:41, Jesus and, just read it there, "'Jerusalem. Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who sent her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you did not want it. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Right there between that verse and then verse 41, coming out from the temple; that is where Jesus watches the religious corruption of Israel in motion, how it devours widows' houses, how it robs the weak and the vulnerable over last few pennies.

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God is not pleased with the offerings that lead to that destitution. He will not allow his name to continue to be associated with such abuses of authority, with such corruption. And so, Jesus sees the situation clearly. His disciples do not. They don't see what he sees. They don't discern as he discerns.

They're not incensed and appalled as he is. They're still impressed, Luke 21:5, by the size and the beauty of the temple. Massive stones at the foundation supporting the big high walls. Beautiful structures of marble. Columns supporting the high roofs. Imposing edifice. Votive offerings, votive gifts adorning the temple. Stunning beauty. Gold, marble shining like the sun. They are like many of us, aren't they? Like many of us tend to do. The disciples are assessing the situation in the temple with human judgement. They're looking at outward appearance.

They're impressed by these superficial signs of success, and they falsely interpret them as divine approval. But God looks deeply to the heart of the matter and when we fail to set God's law as a standard, when we fail to discipline our own thinking, to think in an antithetical fashion, light and dark, truth and

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error, right and wrong, righteousness, unrighteousness, run right, righteousness, and sin. But when we fail to think like that, we fail to think at all. When we fail to think, we fail to discern, we fail to walk in obedience to the truth, we fail to love others in calling them to obey the truth, and ultimately, in all of this, most disappointing to us, we fail to please God. That's heartbreaking.

Considering the God of mercy who loves us, who gave us this written revelation, who gave us the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Failing to please him ought to be the mortifying thought and mortifying concern of every single believer. What do I fear the most? Displeasing Him. What do I? What do I long for the most? Him, righteousness, pleasing him. And I know every single one of you who are born again, indwelt by his Spirit, think the same way. Those who fail to please God, those who are characterized by that; because they're unbelieving, and stubborn, and hard hearted, and sinners refusing to change their ways, they will suffer the vengeance of God's judgement; whether it's a temporal judgement, as in the case of the destruction of Jerusalem in the Temple in AD70, or God's final eternal judgement.

Which brings us to the final point for today, one that is, brings us back to the Olivet Discourse, number three: The coming desolation of Israel's religion. You say, the desolation of Israel's religion. Coming desolation. As I said, God isn't pleased with offerings that lead to a widows' destitution. He's not pleased with offerings that facilitate corrupt worship. He's not going to allow his name to continue to be associated with such abuses of authority and such corruption.

So what's, what's, God going to do now? Is it, is his plan thwarted? I mean, everything's going in the right direction. Everything's moving along the right channel. Everything is moving from glory to glory, prominence and power to more prominence and more power. God stops it all. He will not, as, allow his glory to dwell there, nor will he let his Messiah stay there. And that's what we see, really, is at the conclusion of [you can go back to Luke 21] at the conclusion of the chapter Luke 21:37. Jesus, as it says, teaches in the temple during the day, but he does not stay there.

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He teaches at the temple in the day, but he doesn't get an apartment nearby. He spends the night under the stars. "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." He sleeps there under the stars. On the Mount of Olives. There's some who point out, and I think rightly in Matthew 24:1, "Jesus came out from the temple and was going away." Jesus, being the glory of God incarnate, follows the same path of God's Shekinah glory which had departed centuries before.

John MacArthur says this, "When Christ left the temple in Matthew 24:1, the glory of God went with him. Ezekiel 11:23 describes Ezekiel's vision of the departure of the Shekinah glory in his day. And the glory left the temple and stood on the Mount of Olives, exactly the same route that Christ followed here." End Quote. Obviously the disciples don't realize the full significance of this. They're confused about the significance of the temple, and so Jesus proceeds to set them straight. "It is while some were talking about the temple," the last word, word, of verse 5. We pointed this out last time, *kekósmētai*, the perfect tense of the verb *kosméō*. *kosméō* from which we get cosmetics or cosmology.

Cosmic, 'first to a right ordering of things.' They can't reconcile the seeming order of the temple, the permanence of the temple, its importance in the plan of divine restoration, and its current and future glory. They can't reconcile that with what Jesus is saying, and they're still caught up in the grandeur of the temple. And so, Jesus interrupts their confusion. He interrupts their wonder, their admiration, their bewilderment, whatever it is. And he tells them this straightforwardly. "As for these things, what you're looking at," verse 6, "As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come which there will not be left one stone upon another, which will not be torn down."

The things you're observing, admiring, finally even revering: temple complex, it's all coming down. The well integrated structure the noble stones, all will be disintegrated. The seemingly indestructible will not only be destroyed, will be torn to bits and pieces. He starts in that verse with a word picture and grabs their attention. He seals the prediction with a very strong verb of total abject, total destruction, abject desolation.

The repeated emphasis in this verse on the absolute certainty that this is a done deal. Notice in verse 6, "days will come," days will come, points to this ominous prediction and a divinely appointed time. That is to say, there is no stopping it. And then he gives this picture, "not one stone left upon another." He's portraying this dreadful, successful siege of the city, which he's already declared in Luke 19. He doubles the negatives here, and thus emphasizes the certainty, and then, and then, he ends with this verb of destruction.

And Jesus punctuates the point, emphasizing this in such a way that reverberates in their ears and they're stunned. This is an absolute shock. It's unexpected, unthinkable, unimaginable, and yet with a bit of biblical reflection, as whatever Jesus has been teaching, starts to soak into their minds. The disciples may remember the prophecy of Jeremiah, a prophecy about a den of robbers preceding the Babylonian invasion, which destroyed the first temple.

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You don't need to turn there, but just listen to these very striking words from Jeremiah Chapter 7, "The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying, 'Stand in the gate of the house of Yahweh, and you shall call out there this word, and you shall say, 'Hear the word of Yahweh, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship Yahweh!' Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Make your ways and your deeds good, and I will let you dwell in this place.'" It's not your right!

I will let you dwell here. I'll let you be in my temple. I'll let you come to my house. But, "Do not trust in lying words." Lying words that say things like this. "This is the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh." Is their little mantra. "For if you truly make your," your, "ways and your deeds good, if you truly do justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own evil demise, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

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"Behold, you're trusting in lying words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear while lying, and," and, "burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods that you've not known," and "then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'we are delivered!'-- in order that you may do all these abominations?" Did I save you, so you can sin. "'Has this house, which is called by My name, become, a den of, a robbers' den in your sight? Behold, I, even I have seen it,' declares Yahweh."

"But go now." You want an example of desolation? "Go now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people, Israel. And now, because you've done all these works,' declares Yahweh, 'and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called but you didn't answer, therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I'll cast you out of My presence, as I've cast out all your brothers, all the seed of Ephraim." Look to the north and see what I did to the seat of

Ephraim. Look what I did to the northern 10 tribes. I cast them out, put them in exile. It's coming for you, too.

Jeremiah says to the people who were just about to be conquered by Babylon. That den of robbers' prophecy, Jesus used the same language, didn't he? Just as Jeremiah spoke to Israel, Jesus speaks to Israel once again. Now, we don't know how much time passed before the disciples started asking Jesus questions. We do get the sense, by comparing Luke 21:7, with the other two synoptic accounts, that some time has passed. Luke, no, gives us no passage of time here. He takes us right into the teaching. But the fuller picture does come from Matthew and Mark, both of whom show that time has passed. They're no longer walking down from, from, the Temple Mount, down in through the Kidron Valley, no longer ascending the Mount of Olives. They're, they're, back at, they're at their camping spot. They're settled. They're seated. They're at rest.

Now they're thinking, having set up camp, maybe got a little food to eat or whatever, they're starting to think. They're putting together their questions and they're ready to ask him,

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Matthew 24:3, says "As he sat on the Mount of Olives. Disciples came to him privately saying, 'tell us.'" And in Matthew 24, they ask three things, "When will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming?" And third, "What will be the sign of the end of the age?" The second question about is coming; it's connected to Matthew 23:39, "You will not see me again until you say blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Disciples are thinking, that sounds like a long time.

"What will be the sign of your coming and the sign of the end of the age? Matthew or Mark, 13:3 and 4. "He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James and John and Andrew asked him privately." You know there's two sets of brothers there. "Asked him privately, 'Tell us,'" and, and, two things. "'When will these things be, and what will be the sign where all these things are about to be accomplished?'"

Luke and Mark sound similar, but Luke, in Luke, the focus is on the more immediate situation, the immediate promise of desolation that's coming. "When therefore, will these things be?" Same first question. But the second question, "What will be

the sign when these things are about to take place?" Not, when they're accomplished, but what will be the sign when they're about to take place?

Now, when Jesus answers these questions, he's speaking as a Jew, as the King of the Jews, as the Messiah. He's speaking to his fellow Jews. Notably, these are all believing Jews. He speaks about the future of the Jews as a people. He speaks about the future of the Jews as a nation, about the promises of restoration for those who say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

In other words, the Olivet Discourse is a very Jewish discourse. It's a very Jewish oriented teaching. How's the restoration going to happen when Jesus predicts desolation and divine judgement? How can we reconcile the presence of Israel's Messiah, which seems to indicate fulfillment of God's restoration promises are right around the corner. The presence of the Davidic king is among us. How does that square with the pronouncement of desolation?

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Well, Jesus answers some of that; some of that in this discourse. He's going to give his apostles and prophets, by the Holy Spirit, as they speak to the churches and minister among the churches. He's going to reveal even more things about the future, including the Book of Revelation. But for now, the message is endure what's coming, remain watchful, always be on guard, staying alert at all times, and asking God to keep you faithful. That's a good way for us to end at this point too, asking God to keep us faithful. Let's do that now.

Our Father, we thank you once again for the sending the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Savior. He is our Messiah because he's the only Messiah. He is the Christ whom you have sent. He's the Anointed One. He is the Son of David. He's the one that you have united us to, too; by your grace, through faith; all of your own work, all by your own initiative, by your own decree, for your own glory and the glory of your Son, Jesus Christ.

We thank you that he has taught us. Nowhere as Gentiles, playing catch up, to understand a Jewish mentality and Jewish things. We realize that we have entered into a flow of history,

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a flow of redemption that starts in Genesis, ends in Revelation, and continues on through the eternal age. And we thank you that you have joined us to your people, who belong to you. Please give us the grace, and wisdom, and the leading of your Spirit; the illuminating ministry of the Spirit, to teach us and lead us through this wonderful, beautiful chapter ahead of us.

Let it fill us with hope and great anticipation. Let us always see you high and lifted up, sovereign over all things; and the Lord Jesus Christ, whom you've sent, as the one to whom all authority and power and honor has been given. Let us worship you in faithfulness. Let us separate from a, from a, corrupt and unfaithful world. Let us speak the truth in love, but speak the truth we must. Please give us strength for that, and help us to have our heads up, not sleeping, but fully awake. Let us not be given to any dissolution and drunkenness. Let us not be distracted by the world around us, but help us to keep our eyes on you, on heaven, so that we may be of an earthly good to the people around us. We pray this for your glory in Jesus' name. Amen.