



“Jesus Presents Your Opportunity”

Luke 21:12-19

July 12th, 2020

We are going to be in Luke Chapter 21. Please join me there, as we continue in this chapter containing prophetic teaching from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The title of this morning’s message is *Jesus Presents Your Opportunity*.

I wonder how many of you might recognize this symbol (pastor shows overhead slide.) When the Islamic state had its recent period of power, this symbol was written on businesses and homes. It is the letter *nun* in the Arabic alphabet. This symbol conveyed to everybody that the occupants of that place were Nazarenes. In other words, they were followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

In Iraq or Syria, if this symbol was placed on your place of business or on your home, it came with great risk. It came most often with a very high cost. Without warning, Christians were pulled out of homes and places of business by armed militants. They were told that they would either convert to Islam or they would leave the country, or they would be killed. In the surge of power that the Islamic state had, there were hundreds, if not thousands upon thousands of believers that were killed. There were thousands, if not hundreds of thousands that were displaced and that were made to flee their very homes.

Thank God that for the most part, ISIS has been take apart. But the same demonic spirit that prompted ISIS is still very much rising up all across the earth. There is still fallen, sinful flesh that dramatically opposes the Living God and His people, so there are people being persecuted in the Islamic world, in the Hindu world, in the Communist world, and even to a certain extent, in the secularized Western world. Persecution is a reality.

I wonder if how many of you remember a certain Christmas movie that became popular over the last decade or two. It has a character named Buddy the Elf. I wonder how many of you know what Buddy the Elf likes to eat. Buddy likes to eat candy canes and peppermint sticks and gingerbread and it all had to be drenched in maple syrup. That is what he consumed. That is what his diet was.

Sadly, all across the land, even in the United States, there are churches that are being fed comparable diets. Jesus Christ is not going to feed us peppermints and syrup. Jesus is going to give us meat. Jesus is going to speak to us directly. He is going to speak to us about the reality of suffering and persecution in the Christian life.

Jesus is going to speak about these things. He is even going to speak about giving up our very physical lives for the testimony of His Kingdom. He is going to do so without wincing. He is going call His church even to suffer, even to experience and endure persecution for His namesake with the eternity of His Glorious Kingdom in view.

We have heavy teaching that is here before us this morning, and I pray that the gravity of it is experienced in our hearts as it comes from our King, from our Lord, to us today. Let me remind you that we are in a prophetic portion of teaching of Jesus called *The Olivet Discourse*.

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus was revealing judgement that was to befall the city of Jerusalem in the First Century and He revealed the judgment that will befall the entire world at the end of the age. Jesus went back and forth throughout this chapter between the two so that it would helpful to have bifocal lenses as we look at what is before us today.

The passage that we are going to be digging into this morning, Luke Chapter 21 and Verses 12 through 19, I understand it to be looking primarily back to the First Century. When we look at Verse 12, we will notice the words *before all this*. With that phrase, Jesus took us all the way back to the time prior to the destruction of the temple, which took place in AD70. The portion that we are in this morning, I think first and foremost describes the suffering and the persecution that Christians experienced in the earliest days of the church of Jesus Christ, the redeemed community in the days following after the cross of the Lord.

However, understand and believe that the this has relevance for us today, for there are many Christians who are experiencing similar things in the Twenty-first Century. It can very well be the case that the Lord calls us to walk through such times as well.

So let's see what Jesus had to say. To keep ourselves in the context of this passage, I am going to start in Verse 5, understanding that Verses 12 through 19 is going to be our area of focus. Let's look at what is here. Luke Chapter 21 and Verse 5:

⁵And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

⁷And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” ⁸And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. ⁹and when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take pace, but the end will not be at once.”

¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

¹²But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and

governors for my name's sake. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Here in Luke Chapter 21 and Verses 13 through 19, we have the language of the persecution of the church. It starts in Verse 12 with Jesus saying, "They will lay their hands on you." Understand that in the context of this teaching, it is not talking about a back rub or a shoulder massage, or a hand laid gently on a shoulder for prayer. Rather, this is talking about being laid hold of and being arrested.

Then Jesus went on in Verse 12 to also use the language of persecution. They will persecute you. I understand the Greek term *dioko* to be a hunting term. It has the nuance of a hunter pursuing its prey until that prey is overcome. That is the kind of imagery that is behind that word *persecution*.

Then Jesus went on to use the language in Verses 12 and 16 of being delivered up, which even has the nuance of being betrayed, like Jesus was delivered up or betrayed by Judas Iscariot. The early Christians and people throughout the ages would be handed over to authorities, even by people that they were once very, very close to.

They would be handed over for criminal charges in places where the worship of the Lord was illegal. This is what Jesus was laying out for us here. It is heavy teaching, and it is glorious teaching. Looking at what's at the heart of this, we have this chilling statement in Verse 17, telling us where it is all coming from. Jesus said:

¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

Christians will be hated in this world. Jesus bore testimony about himself, that He came into this world as light into the darkness. But men loved darkness because their deeds were evil. So they tried to overcome the light and they try to overcome the light through violence.

Jesus has given us the calling to be a city on a hill; to be a light in this world, the light for His Eternal Kingdom. We are to shed the light of His truth, that there is one God and that there is one Creator and that as created beings, we are accountable to Him.

But we are fallen in sin and throughout every day life, we so often live in rebellion to the Creator. By His mercy, He made one way to be saved. He designed one path into forgiveness and that path is Jesus. Even that message would be opposed because people don't like being told they are sinners when they are committed to their sin.

Brothers and sisters, we are living in an age in the United States of America where people are absolutely devoted to living lives in rebellion against the Law of the Creator. This is everywhere around us.

Here in this world, we are called by Jesus to be humble, gracious lights to the truth of His Law, and the fact that we all need a Savior because we have all broken His Law. Jesus is that one and only Savior, but Jesus was telling us that we will face persecution for bearing that message. This is here for us in this text.

There are two kinds of persecution that take place in this world. There is overt persecution and there is covert persecution. The overt persecution is where there is actual physical violence that occurs, which results in the shedding of blood and the bruising of bodies. There are Christians experiencing overt persecution throughout this world.

Here in in the United States, it might understood as covert persecution, where people are not going to come right out and physically abuse you. Rather, you will be put to shame for what you believe about Jesus. They might not take your head, but they will fire you for your biblical views. They might not shed your blood, but they will shame you for your world view, and they might put an end to your business. They might mock you in a classroom environment. There are these kinds of ways where it is not necessarily physical violence, but there still suffering that Christians experience.

The call of Jesus here in this portion of Scripture is to endure that; to actively walk through that; to joyfully take that. Not abandoning the faith. Not denying the Name of Jesus. Not saying no I am not a Christian, but saying yes I am a Christian and this is what I believe—whatever comes!

That is what Jesus is calling us to and brothers and sisters, don't think that you can muster up strength within yourself based on your own and spiritual resources to do this. This is a work of God's grace in us. There is something within us that wants to shrink back from this kind of living, so we must go before the Lord humbly, saying, Lord, I am in need of your grace to fill me up and to strengthen me.

Just like Paul said to young Timothy who was pastoring in Ephesus, God has not given us a spirit of fear. But He has given us a spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit of power and love and self-control. It is the work of the Spirit in us.

We must go before the Lord daily, saying, Lord, I may be tempted to commit sins of omission by just not speaking up about my faith. I need for you to fill me up and to forgive me of such sins. I need your grace to help me to be strong under trial.

In this portion of Scripture, what we have is Jesus speaking of such times as times of opportunity. While they are painful times, at the same time, they are glorious things that are at work that have ripple affects into eternity as the testimony of the Gospel goes forth through God's people who are downtrodden.

Wonderful things take place! Jesus was trying to give us a vision of the opportunities that come upon the church during times of suffering in this very brief period that we call time, as we look forward to eternity in His Kingdom.

I want us to see some of the opportunities that Jesus presents to us when we realize that we too have the joy of suffering for His Name's sake. That is exactly how the New Testament puts it. It is a privilege to follow the one who bore the cross for us.

Let's see a few opportunities that Jesus presents. First, let's notice persecution, being hassled for your faith, is your opportunity:

1. To Bear Witness (21:12-13)

It is your opportunity to give testimony. We see this in Verses 12 and 13. Jesus said:

¹²But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness.

That had special application in that early First Century church. What we have here in this section of Scripture almost reads like the book of Acts in compact form. They were literally brought before such rulers. You and I may not, but during these days when people oppose the message of the Christian faith, we have the opportunity to bear witness about the Lord.

What does it mean to bear witness testimony? What is it to give a witness? Basically, you are telling other people what you know to be true by experience. If you go to the movies and you think that the movie is an excellent movie, and you tell other people that it was a great movie and they should go see it. You just gave a testimony about that movie.

You go to eat at a restaurant. The food was good and it didn't cost a million dollars. So you tell your friends about it. What are you doing? You are giving a testimony. You are bearing witness. Based on your own experience, you are telling what you know to be true. That is what being a witness is.

Jesus calls us to be witnesses. We are those who have received God's forgiving grace into our lives, and the calling that is upon us is to bear testimony. We say, I have tasted and I encourage you to taste and see that the Lord is good.

We go before people not as those who are self-righteous, but as those who are sinners who are all messed up, who have all kinds of crazy awry desires within. We say, I am a sinner saved by grace. I have come into this understanding by God's grace. He has made me aware that my life has been filled with things that are all messed up and wrong and mean and abusive. I have done sinful things.

God has made me aware of that and He has made me aware that I'm accountable to Him, but Jesus paid the price for my sin. When Jesus hung on that cross, it wasn't for His sin, it was for mine, so that God, the Righteous Judge, can be satisfied. My sin was nailed to Him on that cross and in Him, I am forgiven. In Him I am set free.

We bear testimony! There was a cross and Jesus is risen and He has brought new life to me. He is the one and only way in which you can be received into the Eternal Kingdom of God. We bear testimony. This is what we are called to do.

What we see here in this passage of Scripture is that it is these times of trouble and harassment, even getting in trouble with the law for our faith, can be times of great opportunity where we gain an audience that we otherwise would not have had. Jesus was saying, You will be brought before kings and authorities.

Sometimes when the heat is turned up, we are put before people that we would have not been put before otherwise. Then there is an opportunity to say, I have tasted that the Lord is good. He is your one and only chance. Jesus died and rose again. You need to repent and turn to him.

Here we see this lived out in the book of Acts. James and John and Peter all gave testimony before the great Sanhedrin. James gave testimony before Herod Agrippa. Paul was taken to the high priest of Israel, who was also Galio and Felix and Agrippa and Festus. Ultimately, we would understand that Paul gained audience before Caesar himself.

Way back into the Old Testament in the first book of the Bible in Genesis, we have Joseph who was persecuted even by his brothers. Then he got to go before the pharaoh. So there could be opportunities where your suffering brings you opportunities that you otherwise would not have.

We have a dear couple that we support as missionaries that can tell us something about this. Charles McIllhenny. Chaplain Chuck and Donna, they serve in the hospitals now but back in earlier years, he was serving as a pastor in an orthodox Presbyterian church in the city of San Francisco, California.

Pastor Chuck and Donna, they took a stand for God's design for sexuality, namely one man and one woman in the context of marriage. That is God's design. Homosexuality is in fact something that is a desire that is awry and when it is lived out, it is something that sinful. There is great hope in Christ, but the fact remains that it is sinful. They took their stand on that and they had their house firebombed because of it. People literally threw bottles filled with some kind of fuel that was lit on fire through their window. Chuck just kept on with Donna's support. They were being faithful in the ministry.

Our dear Chaplain Chuck, he got to go and appeal to more and more authority figures. It got to the point where he got to appear before a man who was then the mayor of San Francisco, a man by the name of Gavin Newsom. I wonder if you have ever heard of him. You can read about this in the book that he wrote called *When the Wicked Seized a City*. This book is their testimony.

Chaplain Chuck got a hearing before Gavin Newsom and I am sure Chaplain Chuck gave him the Power Point I have seen him give before. He is good at it! He informed this man Newsom, Whether you know it or not you are a minister of God in your position and you need to repent and seek grace in the Messiah. I remember reading that book and was saying, Praise God. Wow!

So there are opportunities that can come in times of difficulty. We must say, Lord, help me to be prepared and help me to step out. The big question is: Are we being faithful in day to day life? We are to bear witness. There will be opportunities in hard times that may not otherwise come. But what about everyday life?

I wonder if each and every single one of us here needs to take an honest moment before the Lord asking Him if we are committing sins of omission. Is there something in our fallenness through course of every day and every week where the Lord is clearly giving us the call and opportunity to share our faith and we pull back because we don't want to be awkward. We don't want to make the situation difficult.

So we all have the lingering sin of omission in us, and we need to take it before the Lord, and say, Lord, forgive me and renew me. Spark me. Light me up and help me to be a witness, not only during times of persecution, but every day. I think that each one of us needs to go before the Lord asking Him to help us bear testimony. That is why He has us here.

So let's think about these things and cast ourselves upon the grace of God, which is active not only for our forgiveness, but also for our empowerment. Let's go before the Lord asking Him for His grace to light us up.

Persecution is your opportunity to bear witness says Jesus. We continue and see that persecution is also your opportunity:

2. To Have Faith (21:14-15)

Faith that He will provide the words that we need to say to the people that we will encounter. In Verse 14, based on what He just said, Jesus said:

¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer

Wait a minute! I was contemplating this verse and I telling the Lord that that seems like the exact opposite of what You should have said. Jesus just said that they were going to go before the synagogue rulers, men who knew the Torah and who have Scripture memorized, they were going to go before kings and governors.

However, when we all have those opportunities, isn't it that we should give careful consideration to what we are going to say? If you are going to go before the governor of California or the President of the United States, wouldn't you do a script and write notes and think very, very carefully about what you will say.

That is the parallel, but Jesus said:

¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer

Don't write a script! How is that? Well, then Jesus said:

¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

Jesus was telling His disciples, Don't spend all this time stressing out over what you are going say, because I am going give you what to say at the moment. I am going to provide it for you. Underlying this is the reality that the Spirit of Jesus is with us. He is within us. He never leaves us or forsakes us.

Here Jesus was saying, Yes, when those times of pressure and persecution comes, where it is heavy and thick, don't worry about what you are going to say because I am going give you what to say. This is was a pretty amazing thing that He said.

I was thinking about this and I think Jesus was telling us that He will enable us to do what He had just done. Can you remember all the way back to when we studied Luke Chapter 20? Jesus was teaching in the temple courts. He was sharing the truths of the Kingdom with the crowds.

Then the different leadership groups sent their delegates, one after the next. Here came the Pharisees with their questions, Teacher, shall we pay taxes to Caesar or not? Then came the Sadducees, Teacher, is there really resurrection, for if there is resurrection, what about the woman whose husband died, then the rest of his brothers she married died as well. Whose wife is she going to be in heaven?

The Herodians came with the others to Jesus with the attempt to stump Him. Do you think that, like many pastoral Q&A times, they gave Jesus and list of questions beforehand that they wanted Him to answer?

No! They were trying to stump Him, yet Jesus absolutely silenced them all. They were not able to withstand or contradict Him. If I read what that says, and if it says what it means, Jesus is going to help us to do similar things. That is pretty amazing to think about.

I remember years ago, I went to talk to a person that was dear to Kristy and me, somebody that we were very, very close to who opposed our faith in Christ. This was somebody who was not neutral or indifferent about it, but somebody who was antagonistic about our faith in the Lord.

I said, Gulp, Lord I need to talk to this man. So I went in an attempt to build a bridge and to try and pursue some peace. I tried to anticipate everything that this person was going to say. I was turning it over in my mind.

Brothers and sisters, there is no way I could have anticipated the things that he said to me that day. The whole script that I had written up in my mind, it was blown apart. He came at me this way and that way and this way and that way. Thinking back on that occasion, I praise God for the things that He gave me the ability to say. Things that I had not thought about that week, month, or year.

Yes, some of these things I had considered much earlier in my Christian life. Things in my mind triggered and fired. I think that the Lord was helping very personally and potently at a time where one of His sons was taking a step of faith to do something difficult. The Lord provided!

This is what the Lord is saying to us here. Jesus said what He had to say, I will give you a mouth of wisdom, don't study and prepare ahead of time during these times of persecution. I will give you mouth and mind. I love it in the Greek, I will give you soma and sophia—mouth and wisdom. I will give it to you.

Jesus said that but let's understand that this is no excuse for a pastor, Sunday School teacher, group leader or anything like that to neglect the preparation for their ongoing ministry. Paul told Timothy, a young pastor to study and show yourself approved. Devote yourself to the reading of Scripture, to teaching and preaching.

This means preparation. We are to prepare. There have been a great many lazy pastors who get to the end of the week and have not studied all week, so they think the Lord will provide for them. That is not what this is talking about.

In the language of the beloved pastor by the name of Alistair Begg, "This is talking about those periods of life when the stuff hits the fan and the world is bearing down and you are exercising courage and walking by faith, Jesus is going to provide you with the answers." He is going to provide for you in that time of need. That is a pretty awesome thing for us to think about. So that is walking by faith, isn't it?

Hear me, Christians are to be studious people. Christians are to be people of the Book! Christians are those who read Scripture devotionally. They mediate on it. They study doctrine. They listen to sermons. They listen to Bible teaching.

Here is how it works: You have accrued knowledge in your time walking with Christ and when you enter into situations that are hot and heavy, the Holy Spirit has the power to trigger things that you had not even thought of.

I wonder if you have ever had this experience, whoa, I need to take notes on what I just said. Where did that come from? You need to go write that down afterwards. The Holy Spirit provides. Jesus gives this to us as He calls us to walk by faith.

Persecution is your opportunity to have faith, according to Jesus. Finally, persecution is your opportunity:

3 To Gain Life (21:16-19)

Let's see what comes next in Verses 16 through 19:

¹⁶You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

With all this language about being delivered up by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, I was thinking back to the time that I was a student at Talbot Seminary. Another student there was a man who was a Messianic Jew, meaning that he was a Jewish man who had come to faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.

This young man recognized that Isaiah 53 was clearly talking about Jesus, and he put his faith in Him. He experienced a calling of God that was irresistible and he put his faith in Jesus. And he talked about how his orthodox Jewish family organized a funeral for him. That does not mean that they actually killed him physically, but they reckoned him dead to them relationally.

In some places in the world, they actually kill people for such things physically. In this situation, there was a death that took place in that family relationally, yet here was this man grieving that, having sorrow about that, but not turned away from the Messiah by the response of family members.

Instead, he kept his testimony of faith. He continued to proclaim whatever you need to do to me, Jesus is my Savior. He had endurance. It was that endurance that was the evidence of his genuine faith in the Messiah.

I think that is the heart of what Jesus was saying here.

¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

It is an amazing teaching here. Now, you look at what is in Verses 16 and 18, and it is kind of interesting because they seem contradictory to me. Which is it? At the end of Verse 16, Jesus said, Some of you, they will put to death. Then in Verse 18, He said, But not a hair on your head will perish. Which is it?

Some of you they will put to death, but not even a hair on your head will be harmed. Those two things seem to go in the opposite direction. What is that all about. I think what this is reminding us of is that for the Christian, it is not death to die. For the Christian it is actually truly life to die physically.

In physical death you proceed into an elevated experience of spiritual life. In physical death your destiny of resurrection is powerfully intact. When the day of resurrection comes, you will have even more hair than you have now. I think that is probably the heart of what Jesus was saying here.

It is not death to die, it is life to die. For those who are in Christ, to live is Christ and to die is gain. You gain this increased experience of your salvation, this glorified existence, that will be apart from any traits of sin, pain, sadness, heaviness, depression, guilt, or sorrow. All of this is going to culminate in the day that you will be raised up in Christ, like Christ, resurrected. We live on, Jesus says.

¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Where does this endurance come from? Jesus is your endurance. You are practicing some things. You are going through trials, rather than pulling back and saying, I now renounce the Christian faith. You are going through trials. So Jesus said, By your endurance.

However, do you think Jesus leaves it up to us to conjure up this kind of endurance on our own, as if we could? I would submit to you that it is the presence of Jesus who is producing this endurance within us, because apart from His power we could not do it. It is His grace that empowers this.

Jesus gives us this endurance as a gift, so that it manifests the truth of the Psalm that we studied about a month ago, Psalm 46:

**¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble**

An intensifying and increasing help in times of trouble

**²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea**

Why? Because God is there as our help, causing us and empowering us to do things that we would not do ourselves. God causes this to rise up within us as an act of His grace. So we go before the Lord, saying, Lord, do marvelous things through little old me.

There is a man named John Newton. You probably recognize him for a hymn that he wrote that is called *Amazing Grace*. He had this to say in one of his pastoral letters to a woman under his care who was fearing death. He said:

“Though our frames and perceptions may vary, the report of faith concerning the time of death is the same. The Lord usually reserves dying strength for a dying hour. When the time has arrived that He has appointed for you to be dismissed, He will overpower all of your fears. He will silence your enemies. He will give you a comfortable entrance into His Kingdom. You have nothing to fear from death, for Jesus by dying, has disarmed its sting. He has perfumed the grave and opened the gates of glory for His believing people.”

Words like that are full of grace to strengthen the heart. So, with that we will bring this message to a conclusion by giving the application that the Apostle Paul gave to his young pastoral protégé, Timothy.

Paul said these things even as the time of his departure was at hand, when he in fact would be decapitated by Caesar for his faith. II Timothy 6 through 10:

⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

⁸Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel

What's the call? Don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. Don't be ashamed. Share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God.

May the Lord open our eyes to see the opportunities He puts before us today, tomorrow, next week, next month, and every day until we are called at His appointed time into a kingdom that is glorious beyond our wildest dreams.

God is good! Let's pray.

