

## Jesus' Top Predictions for the Future • Luke 21:5-37

If someone accurately predicted the outcome of the next general election would you be impressed? Suppose the prediction was made 40 years in advance? Would that impress you?

The reality is that people guess the future but they don't predict the future. We make our guesses either on the basis of what we want to happen or by extending patterns from the present into the future. Sometimes future-guessers actually get it right.

But what if someone accurately predicted events that no one else even imagined, events that seemed outrageously unlikely? At first we might be skeptical, but once a prophet gets it very right we are much more likely to listen and believe.

Near the end of his life, Jesus made some amazing predictions. He wasn't predicting just for fun or to impress. He predicted the future in order to impact the way Christians live their lives. Let's take a close look at Jesus' top predictions in Luke 21:5-37.

In Luke 21:5-24 Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be destroyed. It all started when "Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God."

The temple in Jerusalem was an impressive place. It was largely constructed of white marble. The pillars in and around the temple were 40 feet tall, each made from a single stone. Elaborate golden ornaments decorated the temple. One of the most famous was a huge golden vine with clusters of grapes as tall as a man. The front of the temple had large gold plates that reflected the sunlight. Historians say that on a bright sunny day at the right angle you couldn't even look at the temple because the reflection was so brilliant.

From a distance the white marble showed up more than the areas covered with gold. They say it looked like a mountain covered with snow. It was the center of the universe for Jews, their pride and joy, the place where God dwelled and where

they came to worship him. It was unthinkable that anything bad could or would ever happen to the temple. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

Jesus added details to his prediction of destruction. There will be political conflict, natural disasters and social upheaval. He explained what it would be like: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven."

Horrible circumstances will become everyday events. Jesus continued:

*"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!"*

Typically, pregnancy and the nursing of a new baby is the best of times for a mother, but Jesus is saying that a time will come when everything is going to be backward; everything is going to be turned upside down. There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and be taken as prisoners to all nations.

Jesus' prediction that Jerusalem would be destroyed came true. Forty years later, in AD 70, there was a Jewish revolt against Roman authority that went from AD 68-70. The Roman army mounted a siege of Jerusalem from April to late August AD 70. The inhabitants were forced to cannibalism within the walls. Jerusalem was completely destroyed.

The Jewish historian Josephus says that one million one hundred thousand Jews were slaugh-

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tered by the Roman army. Another 97,000 survived and were carried into captivity as slaves. The city itself had every building destroyed. All trees were cut down. There was virtually nothing left. It was genocide. It was obliteration. It was absolutely awful.

Jesus' prediction came true. He knew the future before it happened!

In the midst of Jesus' amazing prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem he predicted severe persecution for Christians. As we look at Jesus' words in Luke 21:12-19 I ask you to adopt a special mindset. Think of these words being directly applied to you. Imagine that Jesus is saying that you will be persecuted because you are a Christian:

*“But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.”*

Jesus made it clear that Christians would not be exempt from the troubles that afflict other people. More than that, Jesus was saying that Christians would specially suffer because they were Christians.

What Jesus predicted not only happened in the first century but in every century including our own. Around the world today hundreds of millions of Christians suffer discrimination, unemployment, harassment, rape, forced prostitution, beatings and death because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Suppose you knew you would suffer for being a Christian. Would that change your mind about following Jesus? What if you knew that your loyalty to Jesus might cost you your job, your marriage, some of your friends, members of your family and most of your money? Would you choose

to believe in Jesus if you knew it might include physical pain and even death?

Some ask why they must suffer if they believe in Jesus. Perhaps it is the wrong question. Jesus promised that many of his followers would suffer because they believe. Jesus taught that discipleship can come with a price. The first century Christians considered Jesus to be worth it. Many concluded that it was an honor to suffer for Jesus.

In Jesus' prediction to his followers he promised both suffering and protection from suffering. That seems like a very strange combination. Yet that is exactly what happened. Christians were seriously persecuted during those years yet they were also delivered from the Jerusalem massacre. Because they heard and believed the predictions of Jesus they fled Jerusalem for the town of Pella before the siege by the Roman army of Titus began. They suffered but they survived.

In Jesus' next words he switched from a first century prediction to a prediction that would be at least two thousand years later. Prediction number one was limited to the area around and in Jerusalem but prediction number two included cosmic signs affecting the entire earth and beyond. Jesus said in Luke 21:25-26:

*“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”*

When these great cataclysmic events take place all around the entire globe Jesus will come back to earth again. This time he will not be disguised in humility as he was the first time. Instead, he will return as a powerful and a triumphant conqueror (Luke 21:27-28):

*“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

The return of Jesus Christ to earth is the climax of all of human history. History is not happenstance. We do not live in a random world. God is the ruler and God is moving everything toward a planned fulfillment of purpose. God will bring

everything together when Jesus returns to take over and rule the world. He will confront injustice. He will make wrong things right. It is the hope and anticipation of every Christian. We are convinced that all that happens from suffering to pleasure will then fit together and finally make sense.

This is more than some wild idea in Jesus' planning. He assures us as Christians that this is guaranteed to happen. In order to explain his guarantee, he told them this parable:

*"Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.*

*"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

Jesus used a fig tree to make his point. When a leafless tree starts to sprout leaves you know what's coming—summer. When the poplar, maple and ash leaves of Minnesota trees start changing color and dropping to the ground you know what's coming—winter. Have you ever known a year when the leaves sprouted and summer didn't soon follow? Of course not! In the same way, when the cosmic signs begin to appear you can count on the coming of Jesus back to earth. It's a sure thing.

When these signs appear we know that we are within a generation of Jesus' return. It could happen all at once or be spread over a period of time but it won't be more than a single generation. How sure is this? Jesus says that heaven and earth may pass away but what he is predicting won't pass away. It is absolutely sure to happen!

Jesus did not make these amazing predictions just to satisfy our curiosity or to show off his prophetic powers. He gave these predictions to change the way we live between now and then. Jesus is very specific about how Christians are to live. In

Luke 21:34-36 he tells us:

*"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."*

Jesus gives some specific advice: Don't let your heart get so weighed down that you are distracted from Jesus. Apparently that was a problem then, but it's also a problem now. Some people get so overwhelmed with life that they don't have time for God. They are so focused on problems that they forget about Jesus. The three most likely ways for this to happen are: 1.) Dissipation: life has no purpose or direction; no focus. 2.) Drunken-

ness: allowing alcohol or drugs to distract us from God. 3.) Anxieties of life: just worrying about all the stuff that fills up life—having the oil changed; the stock market; exams at school.

I believe that this is a very common phenomenon. Christians get so absorbed with life and its problems that we close God out, lose

purpose in life and get weighed down every day.

*"Be always on the watch."* Jesus was concerned that the problems of life and the sins of society would become routine to us so that we would no longer take the threats seriously. Christians must keep up our guard!

It is easy to take dangers for granted. That's the way I look at the potential of California earthquakes. I'm grateful that I live in Minnesota. I would rather shovel a foot of snow off the driveway than crawl out from under tons of building rubble. Every time I visit California I hope that the next big earthquake will be some other time. Yet I see people building expensive houses on stilts over the San Andreas Fault. What are they thinking? But if you live with danger long enough you start ignoring it.

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Jesus said that the way to prepare for massive future changes is to pray. Prayer is not mostly to ask God for something, it's mostly to connect with him and align our will to his. That's what we need to do as we live in anticipation of what is sure to happen. If we don't pray, the anxieties of life and drunkenness and dissipation take over. Just as regular tune-ups keep a car running, a piano on key and a furnace ready for cold weather so prayer is what keeps us in tune with God and prepared for the time when Jesus comes back to earth.

The year 2000 may be best known in history for the mapping of the Human Genome. For the first time in history the genetic code of the human body was actually completely mapped out. Scientists anticipate a time when we can each be told our likelihood for having a heart attack, aneurysm or cancer. Some people say they don't want to know that they will someday have breast or prostate cancer; they'll just deal with it when the time comes. But medical scientists warn that those who know can be prepared and ready.

Jesus has given us a glimpse of the genome of history. It's all mapped out—from the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 to the yet-to-be fulfilled prediction that he will come back to earth again. He gives us this information so that we can be ready. He wants us to be prepared. He wants us to live differently because of what he has predicted. What he says is simple and straightforward:

Jesus will return.

It could happen any time.

Be ready.

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