

## Luke 21:5-19

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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The readings at this time of year are out of sync with what is happening in malls and stores everywhere: they are gearing up for that shopping madness called Christmas; the lessons are gearing up for cosmic conflict and death. Folks come expecting some advance preparation for Christmas; they get lessons about global warfare, plagues, confrontation, betrayal, persecution, and ... endurance and salvation.

I sometimes think we should make the Reign of Christ a whole new Season in the Christian calendar just to give everyone a heads up.

In the unfolding of Luke's gospel, Chapter 20 has been a series of confrontations and challenges with the authorities after Jesus has entered Jerusalem.

The 4 verses at the beginning of Chapter 21 - which are omitted from the lectionary - provide an intriguing transition to the "little apocalypse" of Chapter 21, and the arrest, trial, execution and resurrection which are told in Chapters 22 and following.

Taken out of context, the example of the widow's offering makes a great text for preaching about stewardship. But placed where it is by Luke, the phrase, "but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on," (verse 4) sets the scene - foreshadows - Jesus' giving of his all.

(Aside: And actually, the widow's offering is not a very helpful stewardship lesson, except for those who are destitute: If you are living day-to-day, hand-to-mouth, relying on hand-outs, and have no responsibilities for children or parents, no job, and no animals or property to maintain; and if all the money you have is not enough to even buy food for today and is basically worthless to you; then things can not get much worse, so by all means give all that you have to church, you've got nowhere to go but up.)

Most of the liberal, main stream, historical Biblical scholars that I could consult, see the wording of this text as strongly influenced by the actual destruction of the temple by the Romans which occurred in 70. That is to say, they believe it is altogether possible, maybe even likely, that Jesus made apocalyptic remarks like these. However, in recalling his words, his followers shaped the actual text in light of their own experience of the actual events. This means that we need to hear this text with care - neither dismissing it as not really being what Jesus said; nor taking it as exactly and literally God's words.

It is easy - and probably correct - to read Verse 6 as a forecast by Jesus of dire things to come. Indeed, it was customary for patrons who knew they were about to die, to gather their sons and make their last will and testament: forecasting future events, summing up their life, and giving blessings.

Those who were near death could forecast future events because they were living in a "thin space." That is, they were departing this life and entering the life to come, and so they could glimpse into the life to come and report back. The weight, significance and accuracy of their forecasts would provide confirmation and verification of the truth of all their earthly honour and teachings. This experience was not unique to Jesus. And in fact would be more well known today if we lived more closely with the dying.

However, it is also possible to read Verse 6 as a common sense observation about the impermanence of material things. All structures, no matter how grand and glorious, will decay and collapse, or be destroyed. It is interesting that after just hearing Jesus commenting on the relative insignificance of offerings made by the wealthy, the next thing that happens is people speaking about the wealth and grandeur of the temple. I wonder what would happen if all church

communities lived from a place of knowing their own buildings are impermanent and their own wealth is relatively insignificant?

As I have already said, the scholars I read believe that the details reported in verses 7 to 19 may or may not be the actual words of Jesus, but they are most certainly the actual later experiences of his followers at the time of the writing down of the oral tradition. And so we might risk extracting "general principles" and avoid unfruitful speculations about the concrete details:

- Everything in this world will pass away. (Verses 5-6)
- There will be false teachers, don't be led astray by them. (Verses 7-8)
- There will be calamities, don't be afraid. (Verses 9-11)
- Following me will put you at odds with the folks that run this world, and even your own family. Don't be surprised by - or run away from - conflict. (Verses 12, and 16-17)
- There'll come a time when you'll have to account for why you are my disciple, don't worry about it ahead of time, I'll be with you and give you all the wisdom you'll need at the time. (Verses 13-15)
- Believe me, you won't perish. In fact, you will save your true self. (Verses 18-19)