

Sermon preached at Glenfield Community Church, 16 November 2025

*God, the source of all light, by your word, give light to our lives. Amen.*

## **Luke 21:5–19**

### **Signs of a New Beginning**

In *Paul – A Biography*, New Testament scholar Tom Wright reminds us that many modern Christians imagine salvation as the soul’s escape to heaven — but that was not how the first followers of Jesus understood it. He writes:

“If we were to scour the first century for people who were hoping that their ‘souls’ would leave the present material world behind and ‘go to heaven,’ we would discover Platonists like Plutarch, not Christians like Paul... For Paul and all the early Christians, what mattered was not ‘saved souls’ being rescued from the world and taken to a distant ‘heaven’ but the coming together of heaven and earth themselves in a great act of cosmic renewal in which human bodies were likewise being renewed to take their place within that new world.”<sup>1</sup>

This difference is crucial. Plato imagined salvation as escape — the spirit released from the body, heaven opposed to earth. But Jesus and Paul spoke of God’s new creation: heaven and earth reconciled, body and soul renewed together. It is not flight from the world, but its transformation.

That is the world Jesus points to in Luke 21. When he speaks of destruction and persecution, he is not predicting annihilation, but revealing what will pass away and what will remain when God makes all things new. Temples and empires will fall — the old order will end. Yet faith, endurance, and God’s presence will continue. The signs Jesus foretells are not omens of doom, but reminders of a new beginning already stirring within history.

### **The Signs**

The signs Jesus mentions are both warnings and promises. When Luke wrote his Gospel, perhaps a decade after Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 A.D., those words had already come true.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wright, Tom (2018), *Paul-A Biography*, SPCK, London, UK. P8

Looking back, Luke could see them not only as tragedy but as the labour pains of a new world being born.

Matthew calls these “the beginning of birth pangs.”<sup>2</sup> That phrase changes everything: the language of apocalypse is not meant to terrify but to awaken hope. The collapse of what seems permanent — even the magnificent temple — becomes a sign that God is doing something greater.

Before this conversation, Jesus had drawn attention to a poor widow who gave her last coin in the temple. Seen together, these moments form one lesson: don’t be dazzled by human achievement; look instead to faith that endures. When all else collapses, that trust is what continues.

Every age has its false prophets, wars, and disasters. When such things happen — and they will — Jesus tells us not to be afraid or deceived. The passing of the old world is not the end of hope, but the sign that God still holds the world in being. Discontinuity and continuity coexist: what is false and temporary will vanish, but God’s faithfulness endures.

## **Persecution**

Another sign is persecution. Jesus warns that his followers will face arrest, betrayal, hatred, and even death. Yet he also says, “This will give you an opportunity to testify.”

Persecution, then, is not only suffering; it is a setting for witness. Jesus himself endured rejection and death for his prophetic truth, and those who follow him should not be surprised if the same world resists their witness.

Martin Scorsese’s *Silence*, based on Shūsaku Endō’s novel, explores this very question. Jesuit priests in seventeenth-century Japan face unspeakable torture as they watch fellow believers die. The film starts with a long moment of actual silence and embraces silence throughout its running time. Facing fellow Christians’ imminent execution, one of the priests has to face a dreadful question: God seems absent in this suffering, and he wonders whether renouncing his faith to save others is betrayal or obedience. Eventually, when he is forced to renounce his faith to save his fellow believers, in his agony and vision, the priest encounters the suffering

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 24:8

Jesus, who gently tells him that it's okay to renounce Him— Christ Jesus. As viewers, we can't help but ask the same questions that the priest asks God. We may not suffer public persecution in New Zealand today, or be imprisoned because of faith. Yet faith is often tested in quitter ways – when truth is unpopular, when love is costly, or when God seems silent. In such times, our witness still matters. Jesus' words invite us to recognise these moments as our own “opportunities to testify”—through courage, compassion, and quiet fidelity — as God gave Moses and the prophets the words to speak, so Christ promises to give wisdom to those who stand firm in faith.

### **Life of the Church**

During story time, we watched a little girl care tenderly for a bee. She gave it everything it needed, yet the bee still longed for something – the nature as home. Finally, they work together to sprinkle the seeds and grow flowers and plants. She set it free. The love between them did not stay within them alone — it simply grew larger and took a new form in which many others could also participate.

This small story mirrors what Jesus is saying: love and faith endure, even as forms and structures change. The world may shift around us; churches, traditions, and institutions may pass. But the life of Christ within his people — that cannot be destroyed.

Luke 21 does not tell us to cling to what is crumbling. It invites us to trust that, beyond every collapse, God is bringing forth a new creation. The signs of disruption are not the end of the story. They are the beginning of it.

So let us stay awake, keep faith, and live with quiet courage — trusting that in every ending, God is preparing renewal; in every silence, God is still speaking; and in every loss, the kingdom is drawing near.

Amen.