



Trust in Allah and Tie up Your Camel & Keep Calm and Carry On

Rev Wilf Holt

Luke 21:5-19

Ordinary Sunday 33

16 November 2025

It wasn't that many years ago when the future of our church was looking a bit grim. The congregation was quite small, finances were easy to keep track of – as there wasn't much to keep track of, the roof leaked in numerous places and the windows let in more than light. The number of buckets on the floor would have horrified OSH. Our beloved sandstone was alarmingly degraded – the south parapet had lost at least 15 mils to acid rain and the unfortunate water blasting “clean up”.

I suspect the new vicar may not have initially realised the perilous state of things when he was appointed.

So what to do?

Where would the millions needed for the required renovation come from – could we even think about renovation?

In hushed conversations it was quietly suggested that the only thing we could probably do was demolish the church.

“Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

Grim indeed!

I think you all know what happened.

Keep calm and carry on!

People kept calm and carried on.

Ok – corny, as that phrase sounds, the thought that this structure might be torn down was horrifying- not to be contemplated. Life would of course have carried on. But if we had demolished, I can imagine the feelings and thoughts that might have accompanied that destruction.

Clearly as things turned out, we didn't demolish. Under the guidance of our vicar and others who kept calm the funds were raised, every stone in the church was identified recorded and assessed. Stonemasons were engaged and the building repaired. It all sounds so easy.

Yes we did stay calm – but underneath the surface legs were often paddling wildly.

AS AN ASIDE – did you know that this ubiquitous slogan coined by Britain's Ministry of Information (propaganda department) was never officially made public during the war and only became well known after 2009! It was designed to encourage a stoic attitude, encouraging people to continue with their lives as usual, despite the uncertain days ahead and was reserved for an absolute emergency – such as the invasion of Briton.

Imagine how would the disciples – or anyone who heard Jesus words – how they would react to the prediction that the temple would be razed to the ground – “not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

Horrifying – not to be contemplated!

The temple held immense significance for the Jewish faith. It was the place where sacrifices were offered, the very site of atonement for sin, and God's dwelling place containing the holy of holies, the sacred space where God resided. It was the central hub for the bustling annual feasts and festivals.

Its design sought to reflect the glory and splendour of the first temple built by Solomon during Israel's prosperity.

The temple complex in Jerusalem was huge and imposing. A great feat of ancient engineering, finished under the oversight of Herod the Great shortly before Jesus was born. Including the outer courts, the whole temple plateau was about the size of 17 rugby fields. Well over 150,000 square meters. You could fit some 115 St Matthew's within the Temple complex walls.

The temple itself however, was relatively small at 247 sq meters. St Mats at about 800 sq m could hold some 3 ½ Temples.

That massive complex was predicted to be destroyed. The Disciples were shocked for they were more likely anticipating Jesus's to predict the destruction of the Romans who occupied Jerusalem or the fall of Rome. Instead, he revealed that their temple, would be destroyed, an event that actually occurred at the hands of the Romans in 70 AD.

It was a difficult message for them to hear. While they might have needed the advice “keep calm and carry on,” Jesus's first message was “keep calm and

don't be led astray." He warned them that many would come in his name claiming to be him, but they should not believe them or follow them.

Jesus understood that as tensions escalated leading up to the fall of the temple, many would attempt to lead a revolution against the Romans. They would seek to re-establish God's nation and eliminate the perceived threat posed by the Romans. These individuals would claim to be acting on God's behalf, presenting compelling arguments from Scripture to support their cause. They would proclaim that the kingdom of God would be restored, and Israel would once again be a great nation. Jesus recognised that such a promise of restoration would be a significant temptation for his disciples, especially in the face of persecution, suffering, and the arduous task of living out the gospel.

By the time the author of Luke had finished writing his gospel some 15 to 20 years had passed since the destruction of the Temple, which means that for Luke's readers what Jesus says in Luke 21:5-6 is more a reflection on the temple's destruction than a prediction of it.

Luke uses the destruction of the temple to make a statement on the impermanence of human achievement. In response to their wonder at the temple's beauty, Jesus attempts to divert the attention of his audience from their fascination with "these things that you see".

Their focus should be on something else. What, exactly, is not specified, but immediately before this exchange Jesus drew attention to a poor widow in the temple. Perhaps Luke's Jesus thinks his audience should focus their attention on the poor, not on the temple building.

Those listening to Jesus teach in the temple, however, remain concerned with what will happen to the building. In response, Jesus moves from discussing a specific catastrophic event to more general statements about the coming of false prophets, wars, and other calamities. Here Luke employs language and imagery that is conventional in apocalyptic literature from this period. As readers we now have to decide how we are going to interpret Luke 21:7-12. Are we going to read these as literal predictions of Jesus, or are we going to read this section in light of the aims of apocalyptic literature?

If a story begins "Once upon a time," do we take literally the story's events, or do we adjust our expectations because we recognise it as a fairy tale that is trying to entertain even as it conveys a moral or lesson? The decision we have to make in reading Luke 21:7-11 is similar. A specific genre (apocalyptic) is introduced, meaning we should adopt the interpretive lenses that help us understand this genre on its own terms.

Apocalyptic literature uses unsettling language and imagery as a means to assure the faithful that they should keep their trust in God even when facing

the most challenging of circumstances. Sure enough, while describing the terrible events, Jesus tells his listeners not to be afraid.

There is nothing particularly original or specific about Jesus' "predictions" here. Every age has its own false prophets, wars, natural catastrophes, and so on. We will misread 21:7-11 if we think Jesus is describing a specific set of calamities. The point is that when bad things happen — and they will — we should "not be terrified" or follow anyone proclaiming these are signs of God's judgment and the end. Instead, we should trust that God remains present in our lives.

There is a well known Hadith (**Ha-deeth**) - a saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) involving a camel. Narrated by al-Tirmidhi (Termedi), a Sunni scholar, the Hadith outlines the story of a Bedouin man who was leaving his camel outside a tent without tying it. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) asked him "Why don't you tie down your camel?" The Bedouin answered, "I put my trust in Allah."

The Prophet then replied, "Tie your camel first, and then put your trust in Allah." (**A-luh**)

It seems simple. Tie the camel, trust in Allah, go about your business.

It is a balance between personal responsibility and faith. Do all you can in this world to live as Christ would want us to but ultimately we have to trust in God's plan.

However, that doesn't mean it's easy.

Trust means giving up control. When a friend trusts another with a secret, they give up control over where that secret could go. In a world and a time where it feels like there is nothing we can control, to trust that it'll all be alright may feel even riskier than usual.

It's not easy to trust, whether we're trusting ourselves or the people around us or God. However, it is necessary to keep moving forward. We focus on what we can realistically control, and trust that the rest is out of our hands.

We tie our camels, and then trust in Allah.

That trust, that assurance of God's faithfulness to us in the face of difficult times is the real concern of this passage is confirmed by Luke 21:12-19. Jesus details the persecution that his followers can expect to face: arrests; persecution; trials before government authorities; betrayal by family and friends; hatred on account of Jesus' name; and even execution.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke depicts Jesus as a prophetic figure who risks rejection and death as a result of his prophetic message. Anyone who follows Jesus can expect the same hostility that Jesus and Israel's great prophets endured. Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles (written by the same author who wrote Luke's Gospel) provides numerous examples of early Christian leaders facing precisely the sort of troubles that Jesus describes.

But does Jesus tell his audience they should lay blame on a particular person or group of people, on their society, or even on their enemies, for such treatment? No. He says that persecution is "an opportunity to testify". Just as God gave Moses and other prophets the capacity to speak to and confront their doubters and opponents, Jesus himself will provide strength and wisdom for such testimony.

Using a proverb that signifies divine protection, Jesus tells them that not a hair on their head will perish. Ultimately, their experience of persecution will not end in death but in a victory for their souls.

Underscoring all of these statements in 21:12-19 is the importance of trusting in God even in the midst of hardship and persecution.

A close reading of Luke 21:5-19 shows that using this passage as a springboard for proclaiming God's judgment on society would miss the point. Rather, the passage warns us about becoming too fixated on temporary human institutions, perhaps with the implication that we should attend to the poor in our communities instead and it exhorts us to be firm in our trust in God when calamity and persecution strike. Despite its language and imagery of destruction, Luke 21:5-19 is ultimately a passage grounded in reassurance.

Trust that God remains present in the world and in one's life - even when things have got so bad that it feels like the end of times.

Oh – what was that.

A drop of water

DON'T PANIC – KEEP CALM - CARRY ON

Or in the words of the Prophet (Peace be upon him)

Trust in Allah and tie up your camel.

Umbrella!

AMEN