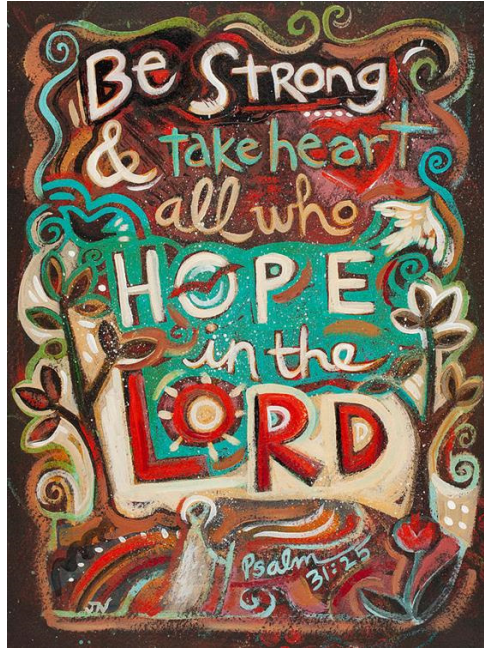


# Upheld When Thrown Down

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



## Prayer of Illumination

God of the earthquake and the silence,  
quiet in us any voice but your own,  
that by the power of the Holy Spirit we might hear,  
and in hearing we might believe,  
and in believing we might act,  
making way for your new creation.  
Amen.

## Background

In this morning's gospel reading from the lectionary, we find Jesus for the third time in Luke predicting the destruction of the beloved temple. When Jesus was alive, the Jerusalem temple was in the middle of a long refurbishment project. The renovation started in 20 BC and was completed in 64 AD. That's 80+ years. Stones anywhere from 12 to 60 feet high were used. White marble columns adorned the temple porches. Gold and silver-plated gates glistened from afar when the rising sun shined on them. Exquisite Babylonian linen tapestries hung from the temple veil. This was Israel's pride and joy. The disciples in our passage were speaking in reverence of this beautiful architectural wonder. Jesus delivers a sobering message—all of this will be thrown down. And it was—less than a generation later.

For a Jewish person, the temple—their pride and joy—was the center of their universe. It would be something like the Statue of Liberty, the White House, or the Washington Monument being destroyed—but much worse. The temple was a powerful symbol of God’s presence with them. And so its destruction would be the end of the world for the Jewish people. But Jesus reminds his people that the temple’s destruction *isn’t* the end of the world. The temple isn’t God—who is eternal. The loss will be painful. But it isn’t the end. The end will come later—when Jesus returns to bring his people home.

As we read, a good question to ponder is: *what’s your personal temple?* What’s most dear to you that’s either vulnerable or crumbling? I certainly know what mine is right now. Jesus is helping us here, on how to pick up the pieces when our world’s come crashing down. The secret is to know that you’re being upheld, even when life is giving you the thrown down.

### **Scripture: Luke 21:5-19 (NRSV)**

<sup>5</sup>When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, <sup>6</sup>“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

<sup>7</sup>They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” <sup>8</sup>And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’<sup>[a]</sup> and, ‘The time is near!’<sup>[b]</sup> Do not go after them.

<sup>9</sup>“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.”

<sup>10</sup>Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; <sup>11</sup>there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

<sup>12</sup>“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. <sup>13</sup>This will give you an opportunity to testify.

<sup>14</sup>So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, <sup>15</sup>for I will give you words<sup>[c]</sup> and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. <sup>16</sup>You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup>You will be hated by all because of my name. <sup>18</sup>But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup>By your endurance you will gain your souls.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

## SERMON – Upheld When Thrown Down

No earthly thing is forever. Or in the words of Jesus, “All will be thrown down.” All earthly things will eventually be thrown down or just thrown away:

- architectural monuments
- new cars and that new car scent
- positions of power
- our candidate or team that didn’t win
- the passing of a loved one
- our health and our earthly bodies.

Moth, worm, time, plagues, and the elements will eventually catch up with us.

What’s new...*will wear out.*

What’s working...*will break.*

What’s found...*will be lost.*

What you’ve worked so hard to get, will one day be taken.

Only Christ the King’s reign in our lives will never come to an end. So what *do* you do next when your “personal temple” has come crashing down? First of all, it’s natural to feel anxious when our world gets turned upside down and inside out. There is a Peanuts cartoon where Charlie Brown is sitting on his bed in the middle of the night and he says, “My anxieties have anxieties.” Anxiety and panic can make us feel powerless—knocking the wind out of us. Psychologist Rollo May says that anxiety is one of the most potent and overwhelming emotions humans can experience. I have to agree with him. With the help of friends, a good therapist, and good God Almighty, anxiety has the potential to help us know ourselves better. It can even grow our souls because the only thing we have left is our desperate need for God. And so Jesus gives us some guidance for those “*what now?*” moments of life.

**First, be discerning.** Be alert. Pay attention. Be circumspect.

Ignatius of Loyola tells us not to make a big and quick decision when we’re in a state of desperation. Slow it down and wait on God. Don’t listen to the “chicken littles” out there saying “the sky is falling! The sky is falling!” In other words, don’t fall for doomsday deceivers and self-appointed messiahs. Filter what and who you put into your mind.

Listen to those who proclaim, not themselves, but Christ Jesus and the good news of forgiveness and grace. Continue to do what Christ has always called you to do—love your neighbor as yourself. Pray. Trust. *That* never changes no matter what other changes are going on.

**Second, breathe deeply.** Jesus tells us like it is, “you will be persecuted.”

Yes, there will be hard times. There will be wars and rumors of wars. People won’t always like you—in fact, they may even hate you. Life will get crazy. Things won’t always go your way, but through it all, Jesus assures us, “*I am with you to the end of the age.*”

The Book of Acts is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. And indeed, it tells us that Jesus *was* right. The early church would suffer for Christ. And in most places today it's still happening. We thankfully have the freedom to gather in worship. However, living in our secular age has its own unique challenges for us as people of faith. God is with us in this, too.

**Third, adjust.** Adapt to the new landscape of your temple-less world.

Find healthy outlets to vent and grieve. Let it out. And then, give up all hope of a better past. Let go...nothing's forever. Forge a faithful "new normal." I got a good reminder of that the other day while making some stress relief herbal tea. On the tag of the tea bag were these words: "**The only constant in life is change.**"

Christ is also a constant for us, for he is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Christ is always here to help us heal, adapt, and move forward in faith. You are promised in our passage of today that God will "give you a word and a wisdom." The Holy Spirit will assist you. He will give us a witness when we're speechless.

**Fourth, trust and obey.** Believe that God can use chaos, adversity, and setbacks to grow us.

This is one of the hardest and most important things for us to believe. You may lose your body, but you won't lose your soul.

**Fifth and finally, endure.** I like the various translations of verse 19:

- **By your endurance you will gain your souls.**
- **By your patience you will possess your souls.**
- **By holding fast and standing firm, you will gain life.**

Cry out to God to help you push through the **pushbacks, setbacks, or backlashes** that are trying to keep you down for the count. We can endure because Christ endures, and we're in Christ. God believes in you, even when you're doubting yourself. Keep the faith because God keeps faith with you.

In Leonard Sweet's book "**Strong in the Broken Places,**" he tells of how the Navajos and Hopis make their sturdy ceramic pottery for everyday use. After they finish making a piece, they let it harden in the sun. But it's still fragile after that. To achieve durability, the pottery needs to be fired—and the Navajos and Hopis have a unique way of doing it. They stack firewood on the ground in a large square. Metal grating is placed on top. Then the pottery is carefully put on top of the grating. They then collect dung from the village animals and pile it around and between the pots—making a mountainous pile of poop. On top of this dung pile a junk pile is then made of scrap metal, old hub caps, and discarded TV dinner trays. The wood frame on the bottom is set on fire to burn for the entire day. In the end, only ashes and blackened scrap metal can be found. The next day, the potters pick through the ashes to find the pottery. The once fragile pots are now rock-solid. They don't chip or break. The process of firing makes them even more beautiful than before going into the flame. Like those earthen vessels, God in his providence strengthens us, even when the poop's getting piled on. When we're going through the flames, we can trust we're gaining our souls. God is building endurance in us.



Jesus likened himself to the Temple. Just as the Temple would be destroyed, so Jesus would die, but he would rise again from the rubble on the third day. Jesus was the rejected stone that was made the chief cornerstone.

The good news Immanuel, even in bad times, is that *we* are the body of Christ. *We* are the temple of the Holy Spirit. In Christ, Peter reminds us: like living stones let yourselves be built<sup>[a]</sup> into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We are upheld, even when we're thrown down.

Amen.

Sermon Art: "*Hope in the Lord*" by Jen Norton

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