

January 2021

Dearest Friends,

I'll cut straight to it; I have a word from God for you:

Be on your guard, so that your hearts will not be weighed down...pray that you will have strength to escape all these things. (Luke 21:34)

Jesus was warning us about the many intense pressures faced by those called to live through the climax of this age. A word of caution and encouragement we could all use right now.

Good heavens, we've just passed through 2020, a year of global trauma. Without a pause to catch our breath and heal, 2021 gets off to a troubled start. New Covid variants, forcing new lockdowns in many places. The American political scene. Lord knows what else (newsletters are slow, but change comes fast; much may have transpired since I wrote this January 13th).

The pressures of this hour are extraordinary. Meaning, way beyond our ordinary.

None of us have ever lived through a global pandemic, and all the heartache of 2020. As if that weren't enough, then came the intense political clashes in the US (but not only in the US). Simply navigating what to say, what not to say, and where to get reliable information adds pressure, confusion and alarm upon our already beleaguered souls. Our enemy, seizing the opportunity, jumped on our vulnerable hearts with Fear, Hopelessness, and a host of other things. It has taken a toll; it is still taking a toll.

Therapists will tell you that putting words to things helps to undo the emotional power and harm of events. That's partly what I'm trying to do here. But what I really want to get to is the rescue Jesus gave us in Luke 21.

I'm very concerned for people, including the people of God. So I turned in January to the scriptures for counsel, and that's when I found myself pouring over and studying Jesus' words of instruction for an hour like this one.

He did say that as things begin to race towards a climax, it would be very hard on the soul:

“But be on your guard, so that your hearts will not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that this day will not come on you suddenly, like a trap; for it will come upon all those who live on the face of all the earth. But stay alert at all times, praying that you will have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:34-36)

O friends, there is such compassion and understanding here; there is also wisdom and instruction for our “escape!”

We all feel the “weighed down.” (When was the last time you had days of feeling lighthearted?) The Greek word for “weighed down” is *Bareo*, which means “to burden, weigh down, depress.” Yep. I've been right there. Burdened by the “worries of life,” which we have more than enough coming at us. There is a truckload of depression out there, along with fear and hopelessness. We are hard-pressed on every side, and our hearts *are* being weighed down.

The good news is, if Jesus warned us about it, then he believed there was a way out. “Weighed down” does not have to be our fate; it is *not* inevitable. Really.

Jesus tells us to ask for strength. The Greek is *Katischuo* and it means, “to be strong to another’s detriment, to prevail against; to be superior in strength; to overcome; to prevail.” It implies a fight, an enemy we can and will prevail over. The only other time the word is used in the New Testament is in Matthew, where Jesus promises that the forces of hell will not “prevail against,” or “overcome” his church:

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (Matthew 16:18)

This is no coincidence, that *Katischuo* is used only in these two verses. The powers of hell are trying to crush the human heart, *especially* the hearts of Jesus’ followers. The strength God urges us to ask for is a combative strength, a strength to win the fight, to overcome.

Which is exactly what we need right now. We need strength of heart, strength of mind, strength of spirit. A strength that prevails against all these forces we see around us.

And, Jesus says there is a means of escape. Wouldn’t you love an escape from all the madness? Okay then—here is the plan:

1. Be on your very best guard, knowing that all this madness is designed to weigh your heart down. It doesn’t have to win. Do not fixate on the “worries of life,” yours or the world’s. Do not turn to alcohol or anything else that “dissipates” your heart.
2. Stay alert, praying often (I suggest daily) for “the strength that prevails,” so that you may escape the intensity of the hour. We can’t do it in ourselves; we need a source of inner strength. God offers it, so ask, ask ask!

We can do this together, friends. With Jesus. And one another.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'John'.

PS. Thank you so much for the outpouring of support in 2020! We are so deeply grateful. Thank you for investing in this mission so that we can move into 2021 helping many find the strength that overcomes!

PPS. We just released new “Mental Strength Pauses” in our fabulous Pause App. They are a rescue, I promise. Download the free One Minute Pause app and look for the new features!