

Temporary
[Mark 13:1-8](#)
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This sweater doesn't look like much. I bought it back in 1998, shortly after I got my first part-time job at McDonald's, mostly because it was cheap. I've had this sweater now for almost thirty years, and even though it's kind of threadbare and thin after all those trips through the laundry, I still wear it every so often because it still kind of fits – it's a little more snug now than when I first got it, but not too bad – and it's still cozy enough to wear around the house. I don't have the heart to throw it away because it's a survivor. If you had asked me way back in 1998, "What do you think will last longer, this sweater, or the World Trade Center?" I probably would've guessed wrong. This seems disposable – it's cheap, churned off the assembly line, flimsy and fleeting, not as solid and dependable as towers built of concrete and steel. And yet, here we are, and after all these years, this has survived.

We expect some things to fall apart, to wear out and run down – we call it planned obsolescence, where our clothing goes out of fashion, our technology gets outdated, our appliances break in a particular way so it's cheaper to just get a new one than repair the old. And some things we expect to last – we expect that the institutions that we rely on, the systems of commerce and politics and philosophy that guide our world, we expect

that those things will be around forever, those things will last for centuries. But as it turns out, sometimes it doesn't happen that way. Sometimes the things we think will last just fall apart when you least expect it, and the things that we think are disposable are the ones that endure.

And the disciples that we see in our reading from the Gospel of Mark, they think they know what will last. They're standing in Jerusalem, in the Great Temple, the holiest, most sacred, most important place in the entire world for the Jewish people, a temple that has stood for almost 500 years. First built by the returning exiles to replace the first Temple of Solomon that had stood for another 500 years before that, the temple in Jerusalem had been expanded and renovated over the centuries, transformed from one little structure on the mountaintop to a network of buildings, all this interconnected infrastructure all supporting the worship of God and the priesthood who served him. The Temple kept growing, bigger and bigger, as more and more wealth from the surrounding countryside was poured into new construction projects, expansions that had been going on since before Jesus and his friends were born. The Temple was permanent, an enduring symbol of the relationship between God and Israel, and standing in such a place, with all that history, all that majesty, all that wealth right there before your eyes, it's no wonder the disciples were dazzled. It's no wonder they felt small and insignificant in the presence of something so strong and immovable and permanent.

But Jesus is less impressed. “What, the temple? Oh yeah, it’s very nice. Shame it’s all going to be destroyed. Yep. All this stuff – all these buildings, all the construction, all the gold and marble and ivory and linens, all the wealth that’s being poured into making this mountaintop one of the wonders of the world, it’s all going to burn. There will be nothing left here but rubble. None of this – none of this is going to last. All of this is temporary.” And of course, the disciples want to know more – what do you mean – rubble? What do you mean, completely demolished, not one stone left on top of the other? When is this going to happen? And Jesus doesn’t give them a straight answer to their question – he doesn’t provide a time and date for them to write down on their calendar. He just tells them that it will happen, and some of them will be around when it does. This coming disaster is coming within their lifetimes – we’re not talking the distant future here, this is something that will happen soon. Which means that the calculations that the disciples have been making in their heads about how wonderful, how permanent, how strong the temple really is, and how weak and insignificant they are in comparison with its grandeur and glory, they’ve actually got it exactly backward. They’re going to last longer than the temple. They’re more durable, more permanent, more lasting than all these lofty buildings and monuments they see all around them. The disciples think they’re small and insignificant and that the temple is permanent, but it’s the other way around. The Temple is temporary. The disciples will last.

And that's a hard thing for the disciples to grasp, but we can't be too hard on them because we have a hard time understanding that ourselves most of the time. We tend to fall into the exact same trap as the disciples – we look at the world around us, and we are so easily dazzled by what we see, by wealth and power, fortune and fame, and we think these are the things that will last, these are the things that are truly important. We look around at these things in our world that seem so old, so permanent, monuments and buildings from civilizations past, pyramids and Stonehenge, towers and statues to triumphant generals and emperors and kings, and then we look at ourselves, and we seem so insignificant. We're only human, after all, these flabby, hairy, fragile little creatures, wracked by aches and pains, bruised bones and sprained ligaments and skewed brain chemistry, just trying to make it through each day without doing permanent damage to what's left of our cartilage. We all know that our time on this earth is short and getting shorter every day, and so we try to make as much of a mark on the world around us as we can while we can, in the hopes that something might last after we're gone. But the truth is that just like the disciples, we've got this exactly backward. All the stuff we see around us, all these earthly things, all the wealth, all the fame, all the glory, all the monuments human beings have ever built for ourselves, all the legacies anyone has ever left behind them, all of that stuff, all of it, it's all temporary. It's all going to end up as rubble, completely demolished, not one stone left on top of another, not one atom still aligned with another. All of this, all of this is temporary. But you and I,

we are eternal. Every human being who has ever lived, we are made of something that will last forever. Not these fragile, flimsy bodies we're in now – these will pass away, soon and very soon, but our true selves, the people we were always meant to be, we will outlast everything else in this universe, we will last forever.

In his essay “The Weight of Glory,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive.” We think that earthly things are so permanent, so durable, so lasting, but the truth is that they are all temporary, but human beings were created for eternity, we were made to last.

And when you realize that this is true, it forces you to look at the world around you differently. We waste so much of our time worrying about things that are only temporary, that are going to pass away. All the troubles we see around us, political appointments and financial systems and carbon emissions, all of these things are temporary. They're going to pass away. And that doesn't mean they're not important, or that we shouldn't care about these things at all – we still need to eat, and stay healthy, and take care of our planet and each other, and so we still need to spend some of our time working on the world around us and making sure that we are good stewards of the many things God has blessed us with. But we still need to

remember that all these things are temporary, they exist only as a means to an end, only to provide us with opportunities to grow closer to the God who loves us, who created us, who laid down his life so we could live forever. All these troubles are not going to last forever. We don't need to worry, we don't need to be afraid, because they're going to pass away, once and for all, and we will still endure.

And once we start to realize how impermanent and fleeting all this earthly stuff truly is, how none of it is really going to last, then we can start to re-direct our attention towards what really matters, what is really going to last. The people around us, the people we run into each and every day, the people we pass on the street without a second glance, they are so much more important, so much more permanent, than all the nations and monuments, all the institutions, all the temples and towers that human beings have ever built, none of that is as precious and permanent as a single human life. That's how God sees us. That's how Jesus Christ sees us, as lives so precious, we're worth dying for, worth seeking and saving the lost. And if that's how Jesus sees us, that's how we can see ourselves, and the people around us, with eyes ready to see what is temporary, and what is eternal, to see what is going to pass away and what will last forever.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!