

**Sermon Notes:** November 13, 2022

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**Focus:** Apocalypse!

*“People are starving in 12 (district 12) here they’re just throwing it up to stuff more in.”*

*---Hunger Games - Catching Fire*

In the Hunger Games, Panem is a fictional society built on the remnants of the United States after a great war. Panem’s capitol was a picture of opulence and extreme wealth. The capitol got that way by extracting the wealth of the “districts” (12 of them and later 13). The leaders kept their thumb on the districts through violence and “hunger games.” Gamemakers picked children from the districts to fight in a game to the death - for entertainment.

In the Bible, the elite were divorced from the reality of everyday people of Roman occupied Palestine. When we get to today’s gospel, it takes a little work to see how these stories are not strictly a bummer. These stories were meant to be an indictment of the powerful, and an encouragement to the less powerful that God, not Herod’s temple, would endure.

Some of the most aggressive (maybe terrifying) texts of the Bible include the end of days, falling mountains, fiery ovens, and burning skies. It is hard for modern people to see how they are meant to help the listener persevere. It’s hard to see Jesus casting doubts on the idea that God only favors the rich and powerful when he talks about rubble.

Many times, Jesus is saying “hey you elites, you’re not in charge - your days are numbered.” And he uses some extreme language to do it. Jesus knew the human cost of elite excess. I think that is why he got so cranky when people kept ooing and awing over the temple in the Gospel today.

The Jerusalem Temple was surely stunning. The Temple had been refurbished lavishly by a terrible dude: Herod the Great. The updated Temple had taken eighty years to complete and included a massive expansion of its footprint. Sparing no expense, Herod had employed the most talented artisans to shape marble accents sixty-seven feet long, twelve feet high and twelve feet wide. Gold and silver doors were everywhere.

**Today** There is danger with these texts today. We think the stubble burning ovens in Malachi and Jesus cursing the temple to rubble in Luke are just weird blips and we ignore it. Or maybe we take them *really* seriously and see signs of the end of days everywhere in our workplaces, towns and country. Ignored text is one thing. Misread apocalyptic literature can be very destructive - no pun intended.

Apocalyptic worldviews can give delusional Christians an overinflated sense of spiritual self-importance. Your boss gave you a bad review; he is part of the godless horde destroying America. You don’t like decisions your school board is

making; they are really a harbinger of the end of everything you love. Were you a religious windbag and people called you on it? You're not to blame; it's them getting in the way of God's purpose. Sounds like I am exaggerating, but I am not. Christians can easily think that they are a persecuted minority.

See this [Atlantic article about Christian Persecution Complex](#).

Delusional persecution is a feature, not a bug, for many Christians. Remember the War on Christmas? Oppressive PC police are trying get good God-fearing Americans to stop saying, "Merry Christmas." Let's see if there is another round of people railing against Starbuck's for not having enough merry Christmas cups this year.

### **This American worldview is incompatible with the Biblical text**

Jesus was telling those who had been beat up by the system to persevere because God was going to make things better. It's like he was saying to that audience 2000 years ago, "Were you one the many people exploited to build Herod's temple? Take heart, even that won't last, only God will endure."

**Me** When I was a kid, my youth pastor read a section of The Voice of the Martyrs to a bunch of white middle class teenagers living in the bucket of the Bible Belt (The Berlin Wall would fall a few years later):

The Communist soldiers had discovered their illegal Bible study. As the pastor was reading from the Bible, men with guns suddenly broke into the home, terrorizing the believers who had gathered there to worship. The Communists shouted insults and threatened to kill the Christians. The leading officer pointed his gun at the pastor's head. "Hand me your Bible, we will let you go, " he growled, "but first, you must spit on this book of lies. Anyone who refuses will be shot."

The man slowly got up and knelt down by the Bible. Reluctantly, he spit on it, praying, "Father, please forgive me." He stood up and walked to the door. The soldiers stood back and allowed him to leave. Quietly, a sixteen-year-old girl came forward. Overcome with love for her Lord, she knelt down and picked up the Bible. She wiped off the spit with her dress. "What have they done to Your Word? Please forgive them," she prayed. The Communist soldier put his pistol to her head. Then he pulled the trigger.

This story freaked me out. Would I love Jesus enough to take a bullet, at 15? Would I work against the godless trying to hurt my faith? Are my classmates really part of the godless army ushering in the Apocalypse? The problem is that it was fiction meant to manipulate our heart strings. It warped the God of the Universe into a God who tests our loyalty at every turn.

I must believe that God is bigger than this. I think the well-worn aphorism is better for understanding apocalyptic texts. Jesus came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

**Todd**