

**CHRISTMAS THIEVES**  
**BUSYNESS—PARTYING WITHOUT CELEBRATION**  
**Luke 21:34-38**

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**WATCH/LISTEN:** <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/christmas-thieves-busyness-partying-without-celebration/>

This Advent season, we are thinking of Christmas thieves, those things which rob us of joy and peace this season. So here we are, all living in this December frenzy, drowning in activities, suffocating in to-do lists, over-caffeinated, trying to figure out what is important. Trying to listen for God's whisper. Trying to find space to breathe. Jesus offers a us help. And his words have a tone of urgency, because in Luke's gospel, these are Jesus' last public words and because Jesus is saying that someday, history will end (the context of Luke 21). To help us face it, Jesus offers a warning and word of encouragement.

First, the warning. He cautions us in v. 34 not to be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the cares of this world. Dissipation is a dizziness, loss of control, a loss of the center, a loss of focus. If our lives are empty or wracked with pain, all we want to do is numb that pain with alcohol and other drugs, or fun, or hobbies or busyness or activity or possessions. Years ago, I heard someone say that the world parties in order to forget while God's people celebrate in order to remember.

Don't be weighed down by worries and anxieties, because when we do, we lose our sense of proportion—what is big/small, what matters/doesn't. Former U.S. Senator John Danforth writes in one of his books how easy it is for us to get caught up in ourselves, and to lose our sense of proportion, whether or not things are big or little. He was sweating a really close re-election race, not sure he would pull it off. In the depths of his despair, his then fifteen-year-old daughter said matter-of-factly, "Well, it's not the World Series" [*The Relevance of Religion*, p. 16].

Jesus warns us that this busyness and preoccupation can become "a snare," an animal trap. There are three simple things about a trap. It is designed to deceive. It comes suddenly. And if it is effective, we cannot get free from it. Here's the thing. We keep thinking if we party enough, if we have enough stuff, if we stay entertained and have enough fun, our soul will feel satisfied. And we think, "Maybe Christmas will fix me. The holidays will cure my pain." No. These things will never really deliver on their promise to make us happy, to bring us soul-deep satisfaction. By contrast, scripture teaches that God's good things are rust-proof (Psalm 111:7, The Message; Matt. 6:19).

Now after stating the warning, Jesus offers the encouragement in v. 36. Be alert and prayerful. But how do we do that, in this frantic world, with so many thieves, stealing our time and attention? Well, for one thing, we could look to Jesus for an example. Note carefully in vv. 37-38 Jesus' rhythm, his back-and-forth routine. By day he was teaching in the Temple. By night he was growing quiet, staging and preparing himself on the Mt. of Olives.

Here is a picture I took, standing on the Mount of Olives, looking west toward the Temple site in Jerusalem. The Kidron Valley separates the two, a walk of about three-fourths of a mile. Note Jesus' habit. By day, in the busy rough-and-tumble of the holy days and festivals and endless demands on his time; by night resting, refreshing, quietly listening on the Mount of Olives. And the Kidron Valley provided his buffer. What is your Kidron Valley? Where is it? "Pray and be alert," Jesus admonishes.

Remember this. No one can take Christmas from us without our permission. We're in charge of our own schedules, our time and priorities. I once heard Oprah Winfrey say that the most important gift we can give ourselves is time, time to be present [Podcast, "Oprah's Super Soul"]. Jesus calls us to slow down, pay attention and not be swept up in culture's shallow agenda. Time to live an authentic—not shallow—existence. The word "advent" means appearing. Jesus is constantly advent-ing, showing up—if we are quiet enough to see and hear him.