

November 29, 2009
Advent 1

“Keep Watching”

LUKE 21:25-36

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” ²⁹ He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³⁴ “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.

If you change planes in the huge O'Hare airport in Chicago, you may find yourself going through a long underground tunnel that leads from one terminal to another. The long walk is made easier by a moving walk way. As the music plays in the background you constantly hear a voice overhead that says, “Keep walking. Keep walking.” The airport people want you to keep walking in addition to being carried along by a moving walkway

In these words just read to you our Lord Jesus talks to us about living in the last days. To help us get through these difficult times he constantly speaks to us, “Keep watching,” “Keep watching,” as we walk through this life. He tells us “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

The other day I noticed a girl texting on her cell phone. She was so engaged in what she was doing she almost stepped off the curb into busy traffic. How easy it is for us to be so weighed down by the cares and worries of this life that we don't look up and watch as much as we once did. We need to hear the voice of Jesus speaking to us as we go down the walk of life constantly telling us, “Keep Watching.”

Watch for the signs

Jesus has given us signs to help us keep watching. “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.” The Lord God has given us the sun, moon and stars to mark seasons and times of the year. They also serve as signs to remind us that Jesus could return at anytime.

Every setting of the sun reminds us of our mortality, and every dawn of a new day reminds us of the new life we will have in the resurrection on the last day. Strange appearances in the heavens of comets and meteors and eclipses are even more dramatic signs to remind us the end is near. When the sea roars and swallows sailors at sea, or a tsunami takes away thousands of people, they also serve as a reminder to us the end is near. Jesus also told us that nations rising against nation, wars and rumors of war, sickness, famine and false teaching in the church are also signs the end could come at anytime.

And what is the reaction to seeing these signs that appear? "Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken." Remember the scary part of the movie "Jurassic Park" where the man was being attacked by raptors. His eyes were wide open in fear as he knew his end was near. So it will be when the signs point to Jesus return. People will run for fear, but there will be no where to hide. They know they will have to answer to God for their lives of sin they have lived. If they do not have Jesus, the fear in their eyes will be terrible and blood curdling screams will come from their throats, a most hideous thing to behold and hear.

How will it be for you dear Christian? When you start seeing these signs fulfilled will you want to run and hide? No, that is not what Jesus tells us. He says, "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near." Run and hide? Not at all! When Jesus comes you will want to run out in the open, stand up tall, lift up your head, and shout to each other with joy, "What a day. Jesus is coming to take us home."

How can you be so confident that you will welcome Jesus when he comes again on clouds of glory? It is because you have seen his glory when he was born into this world as a tiny baby in Bethlehem. John 1 says, "And we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." You have seen the glory of Jesus, God's Son, when by a miracle he was able to take upon himself every sin that you have ever committed. You have seen the glory in the way he died a most shameful death so he might forgive every shameful sin of your past life and mine that cries out to God for punishment and revenge. You have seen the glory in Jesus when he rose from the dead. He even let you see the nail prints in his hands. Because you have seen this glory and believe in it, you are ready to welcome Jesus when he comes in clouds of glory. This will not be a day to hang our heads in shame or find a place to hide. This will be a day to lift up our heads and welcome his return with joyful hearts.

The signs are there to help us keep watching. Jesus compared them to the buds and budding fruit of the fig tree. "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourself that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening you know the kingdom of God is near." I am holding in my hand a branch from the fig tree in our back yard. The leaves are dropping off and the last of the fruit is trying to ripen in the cooler air of an approaching winter. Next spring these branches will put out new leaves, and new fruit. These budding branches and budding fruit are sure signs that later on in the summer you can enjoy the delicious fruit from the tree. Just as we live with the hope that budding fruit trees will be fruit, we live with the daily hope that this may be the day that Jesus returns, because all of the signs have been fulfilled.

When you see these signs, you know the kingdom of God is near. Then we will see our King come to us in all of his glory. We will see him come to take us home with him to the place he has prepared for us. A few weeks ago, the San Francisco Forty Niners football team lost a close game to the Minnesota Vikings. Their new coach came into the locker room and saw them with their heads hanging low. He told them to lift up their heads because they had played a great football game. When Jesus returns we will lift up our heads, not because of how we have done in the game of life, but because of the victory that Jesus won for us. It will be the ultimate celebration.

We don't have to wait until that day for the celebrating to begin. We can start right now, at this moment and time in our lives. The stress of these last days is tough on us. Jobs are being lost, families are in crisis, our State of California in a terrible mess, our nation is having its problems. Then there are the personal battles we have paying our bills, struggling with help problems and getting discouraged. We fight against sin, doubt, guilt and lack of faith and trust, failures to pray as we should. All of these problems seem insignificant as we contemplate the reality that Jesus could return before this day comes to a close. Let the signs Jesus gave you help you keep watching and put everything the right perspective.

Watch for the dangers

There are also dangers that we need to be aware of as we wait for Jesus to return on clouds of glory. Jesus warns us with these words, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. Be always on the watch and pray that you will be able to escape what is about to happen." This trap I am holding in my hand is not very appealing to a mouse. However, if some cheese or peanut butter is placed on the trigger of the trap, the mouse cannot stay away, even though it senses danger. If a person becomes drunk they start losing their ability to drive a car, or even make good moral judgments. We would be amazed at how many people have engaged in immoral behavior because alcohol impaired their judgment.

Equally as dangerous as alcohol is the danger of getting so caught up with the worries and cares of this life that we no longer wake up each day thinking this could be the day Jesus is coming to take me home. Jesus warns again letting our hearts get weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life. He told us that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of thing he possesses.

I know I have shared this illustration in the past but please bear with me because it helps illustrate the point. During WW2 soldiers on one of the islands of the Pacific were having problems with monkeys stealing anything they could get their hands on. They didn't want to shoot them and the monkeys were too fast to catch. One brilliant fellow decided to put candy, and fruit and colorful objects inside a jar with a narrow top. The monkeys would reach in, grab some treats and then could not get their hands out of the bottle. The soldiers were able to run up to them, throw a net around them and haul them away to a different island. One soldier described how the monkeys would have a pathetic, sad look on their faces as they were being captured. Think of the people you know who have become so enamored by either the blessings of this life or even its problems that they no longer look up to Jesus and think about him soon coming in the clouds. Such thoughts

about Jesus are not even anywhere near their daily thoughts of life.

How will we stay faithful to the end? How will we continue to watch and not grow weary? Again Jesus has the answer. He says, "I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." As long as this world stands there will always be a generation of people who are faithfully waiting and watching for Jesus return. Jesus keeps these special people close to him by the power of his Word. He says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words shall never pass away." These words of Jesus strengthen us every day. They tell us to keep watching. They give us the strength and desire to keep watching. Listen to Jesus speak to you on the pages of this book and you will hear him saying to you as you walk down the road of life, "Keep watching. Keep watching. Keep watching." Amen.