

Advent 1
November 29, 2015

“Watch the Signs for Jesus’ Return”

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.

They keep telling us to that we could have huge El Nino storms this winter. Everywhere you go you hear people saying that they cannot wait for the rain to come. It is amazing how the weather people can predict the coming of a storm. They can even show on a weather map how the rain is developing and when it will arrive.

In the words we just read to you our Lord Jesus tells us to check the signs for his return. I am sure that you check the weather on your smart phone or computer, especially if you are traveling or planning activities. In all of the plans we make this coming week and thorough out our lives Jesus wants us to keep in mind that he could return in clouds of glory at any time. He wants us to watch the signs for his return.

Watch for Jesus

Do you want you a lift in your life? Then use the signs of the times to face each new day with eager anticipation that this could be the day that Jesus is coming on clouds of glory. Jesus said, “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.” In Genesis one we hear that our God created the heavenly lights to serve as signs to mark the seasons, and days and years. The heavenly bodies also serve as signs to remind us Jesus could return at any time. Every setting of the sun reminds us another day of life has come to an end. Every dawning of a new day reminds us that we have one more day to live for Jesus before he calls us home. And when there are strange appearances in the sky such as meteors or eclipses or solar flares they serve like flashing lights on an ambulance to remind us the coming of Jesus could be at any moment.

In addition to the signs in the skies we have signs in nature such as the roaring of the seas. The 1984 El Nino storms produced such large waves that piers up and down the coast were destroyed or damaged. And when there are earthquakes under the sea, tsunami waves can take thousands of lives. This current El Nino is expected to produce severe flooding in South American and severe drought in Africa. There are also signs in society such as wars and rumors of war. The Roman Catholic pope made the news this past week when he said, "How can we celebrate Christmas when the whole world is at war?" And there are signs in the church. Jesus spoke of false teaching that is so deceptive even the very elect can be led away.

People are afraid of what may come in the future. "Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken." Do you really want to go to Paris? Do you want to fly over the Mideast? Are you sure you want to go to a resort on the balmy shores of West Africa? When people think about dying, they think twice about traveling in certain dangerous places. Along with the fear of death is the greater fear of standing before God and answering to him for the kind of life you have lived.

Have you ever been afraid of dying? I have. I have vivid memories of living through the 1950's when there was the constant fear that we might go to war with Russia and they would unleash their nuclear bombs on this country. They even had bomb drills similar to earthquake drills where students were told to hide under the desks. What good would that do if there was a bomb? One of relatives bought a home and it came equipped with a bomb shelter in the basement filled with bunk beds and other equipment necessary to survive the blast of a bomb.

Why was I so afraid? I had convinced myself that the chain reaction from the nuclear bomb would go into all matter. I was afraid of dying in my sleep in a ball of fire. So, I would try to fall asleep, praying for Jesus to forgive me of all my sins. Then I would try not to think of anything bad so it would not be held against me. It was at that time of my life that I also started reading the Bible that had been given to me. That brought me closer to Jesus and his love for me and the fear went away.

The signs are flashing all around us but we do not have to fear if Jesus returns in glory before this day comes to an end. "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 you heads for your redemption is drawing near." Notice Jesus does not tell us to find a place to hide when he comes in cloud of glory. Instead he calls us on to stand up straight and tall and look up to those clouds of glory for he is coming to redeem us and rescue us from this life with all of its problems and troubles.

You see dear Christian, you know that even your best behavior cannot prepare to meet Jesus when he returns. You know that even the smallest sins of this past week or even this morning cause you to fall woefully short of God's glory. You also know what Jesus has done to redeem you from your sin so you are ready for the finally redemption that will take place when he returns.

We find such comfort the words of Revelation 7 were it says, "After this I looked and there

before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.”

There is so much that can condemn us when Jesus returns. Even when I try to not let sinful thoughts come into my mind, they still do. You have the same struggle I do. But then we hear these words that our salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb. It is all about the blood of Jesus that washes us clean and all about the white robe of righteousness we have in Christ. When Jesus returns you will not have to say to yourself, “What do I have to do to get ready?” You are ready because of the forgiveness and salvation and perfect life he has won for you.

So we love the signs that point us to hope we have that Jesus could return at any time. 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 bear fruit, we live with the daily hope that this may be the day that Jesus returns, because all of the signs have been fulfilled.

Some of you have lived in the northern regions of our country. You know what it is like to go through a gloomy, dreary, cold winter. But then the days get longer, the sun gets warmer and brighter, the snow melts and the tulips start poking their little green shoots into the soil. Soon the trees begin to bud and fruit trees bloom and then the lilac bushes send out the fragrant smell of lilac blooms. Summer is on its way. All the signs are there for Jesus to come and take us to the place he has prepared for us. How we long for that day to come quickly.

Watch yourself

The signs also serve another purpose for us. They remind us to watch ourselves so that we do not become so trapped by our daily routines of life that we forget about Jesus’ return. 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. We don’t want our hearts to be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of this life so that we become trapped and lose sight of our Savior and what he has done for us. Dissipation is wasteful indulgence. How easy it is to indulge in the pleasures of life and lose touch with what really matters.

Excessive drinking can lead to losing self control. See the young woman who loses the respect of her coworkers because she has had too much to drink at the Christmas party. We fret and worry and become anxious because of our stresses in life. We short-circuit the time we need in reading God's Word and in prayer. All of these are traps that can keep us from looking up and anticipating Jesus' return in glory.

And so we pray. We pray constantly. When we see the signs all around us that the end is near, it is our cue or our prompt to devote more time in prayer. Your smart phone can alert you about appointments coming up. The signs alert you to spend more time in prayer.

Where will we find the strength to stay faithful to the end? Jesus has the answer to this in verses 32 and 33. "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 be a generation of people who will be faithful. There will always be a remnant who are preserved and kept in their faith by the word of God. Jesus assures us, "Heaven and earth will pass away by my words will not pass away." Keep reading your Bible a little each day. Let the signs of the end lead you to open it up and believe every word is true and every word will strengthen you. We can't wait for the winter rains to come and we can't wait for Jesus to come and take us home. Amen.