

Sermon Advent 2 2020

December 6, 2020

Luke 21:25-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

I know I've mentioned this before, but I very clearly remember the events of September 11, 2001. I remember waking up and walking out down the hallway in my dorm, where someone had drawn a picture of a plane crashing into one of the towers, saying that, what we came to call, the first crash had happened. I went to class thinking it must have just been a freak thing and not much more. Then in class, we sort of went as normal, not knowing what else was going on. After class, I walked to the local Circuit City and bought a CD that was released that day. Then I went back to my dorm room to listen to it, only to find out just how crazy things were. There was the second plane in the second tower, the plane in the Pentagon, the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania. I'm sure you can recall just how eerie of a time it was.

However, as I say all of those things that crossed through my mind, something else did too. I think when I spoke of these events before, I mentioned how they occurred in the fall of my junior year of college. That was an important year for me because that is when I had really become serious about studying the Bible, I had dug in with the Bible Study group I had gotten connected with. I had read the Left Behind books, and all of the things like that. Suffice it to say I had become very zealous for the faith. While I've mentioned some of the things that went with that like self-righteousness, I also remember these events bringing about a very distinct excitement. You might think, how so? How would plane crashes and people dying make me excited? Well, to be fair, there was that part of me that was self-righteous and sort of viewed this as deserved judgment. Thanks be to God, He has made me much more sympathetic since then. But that judgment wasn't what excited me. No what excited me was the connection I made to passages like our Gospel Lesson today. What excited me is that I looked at this as a sign that the season was drawing near for our Lord's return. All of this looked like Jesus was going to come back anytime.

Now, I look around at all the things going on around us today. We've got even more concerns than then. We've got pandemics and social unrest. We've got the effects that are seemingly impossible to avoid that all of this will bring in the days to come. We've got a society that is changing drastically compared to my youth. We've got thing after thing

that's difficult in our world. And what does it look like? It looks like Jesus could come back at anytime.

Now, to be sure, I don't look at all of this with the excitement I did when I was younger, but there's still anticipation. I'm hopeful that God has created a more mature response than when I was younger, but you likely have heard me say it: "Come, Lord Jesus."

But as I speak like that, there can be an aspect where we understand exactly what Jesus is saying about the end and think, "Are we sure we want to pray that?" I mean look at what Jesus describes here: **"there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world."** This doesn't sound like a good time, does it? And it's pretty clear throughout the New Testament that the time immediately before our Lord's return will be worse than they have been. Things appear that they will get more and more chaotic as it gets closer. How do we respond to that?

Well as we look at our response now, I think we tend to respond with nervousness, anxiety, worry. That's sort of our mass default, isn't it? Think about when chaos occurs, what ensues? More anxiety, which creates in more chaos. You have anxiety over whether you'll be able to get toilet paper. So, the news tells people that toilet paper is being bought up, and more people flock to buy their toilet paper.

Yet what is the very thing that Jesus says to do in the midst of this? **"Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap."** It's so easy for us to get drawn up into these worries and to home in on them to the distraction from what's important. It's easy in this time to be weighed down by those worries, to find other comforts in the midst of them, to turn to something like alcohol to soften the challenges of this life. And to be clear, we don't need to be teetotalers, the Psalm says that God gives wine to gladden the heart of man, but there's clear instruction about drunkenness. Why? Because it leads to debauchery, it leads to other sin, it has at its root a filling of one with something other than the Holy Spirit.

But Christians, rather than the anxiousness that we're all prone to, hear this for what it is. Hear it for what it is as the call to be ready. That's what Jesus is saying. He's saying "don't get weighed down by all the stuff of the world, because that can turn you from what's important." Instead of turning in on your anxieties and worries, when you see

these signs like the fig tree shows forth summer, “**straighten up and raise your heads.**” Look to the coming of our Lord. Does that mean literally look to the sky? Well, maybe not literally, although it’s OK if you do. But it means be ready. It means look to His Word. Look to what He says. Look to His care about how He loves you and won’t leave you or forsake you. Or look to His love and how He loves the whole world. Look how He loves even those who don’t believe in Him so much that He has died for our sins, those who believe, and the sins of the whole world.

And look to the certainty He provides for you of His care for you. Look at the fact that He has put you where you are hearing these words spoken into your ear. I think I’ve mentioned that before, but Luther called the ear the organ of faith. He has made sure that your ear has heard that word. He has spoken it that you would be able to rest in the assurance of His love and care for you, in His baptism where He cleansed you, in His meal where He fed you. Look to that. Straighten up and raise your heads.

And why? Because your redemption is near.

I think we so often think about that Day of Jesus’ return with fear, if we think about it at all and don’t just think about death and our souls going to heaven. But this return of Jesus is the fulfillment of all things, it’s the be all end all. It’s the point of the whole thing.

Now to be fair, we can understand why this is associated with something scary. There is the judgment that will come on that day. It’s not without reason that Jesus tells the people that they need to be ready for it. He’s not just trying to motivate a team for a good game. No, He’s telling people that they don’t want to be on the wrong side of the judgment. He’s making the point that there will be very real consequences for denying Him, for denying the faith, for getting sucked up into the worries and false trusts in the things of this world. And why?

Because He tells us what that means. He is clear in no uncertain terms that this means condemnation, it means Hell. That this is a very real consequence.

But as I often say, we have to understand that in Scripture, judgment against God’s enemies means salvation for His people. You know, we see this exemplified, or at least explained in a few spots. Think about the flood in particular. The flood saved Noah and His family, eight in all. And that’s the language that Peter uses about it. He says in his first letter that Noah and His family are saved. The rest of the world is washed away in judgment, but this means salvation for Noah and His family.

So also, when it speaks about fire. Fire is used to describe judgment in a lot of places. Look at our Old Testament Lesson from Malachi: **the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.** You can picture the remnants after a fire has razed all the plants in an area. There has been destruction and all that is left is bits remaining. That's fire. But fire is also used in refining. Fire purifies. For example, it speaks of God as a refining fire. Fire was used to purify, to refine metals. You would put metal in a fire and the impurities would burn out of it. Fire cleanses.

So as much fear and worry as there might be associated with all of this, there is the flip side which is salvation. And that's what Jesus points to in particular for His people. He says, look up, straighten your heads. **"Lift up your head, you mighty gates,"** as we prayed in the Psalm last week. To what end? That the King of Glory may come in.

Or our Lord says it like this in today's lesson, **"when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."** Your redemption is drawing near. Do you ever take a minute to be still and consider that? Your redemption is drawing near. As the Lord Jesus has taken your sin upon Himself, He has redeemed you. He has paid the price of your sin and redeemed you, liberated you from the prison that is sin, that is death, that is suffering under the tyranny of the evil one.

And He is coming to bring the fruit of that to you. He is coming soon to carry you to the Kingdom that will bring all of the comfort that goes with that. The redemption, Paul says even the redemption of your bodies. Your aches and pains, gone. Your bad hips and knees, made anew. Your blood pressure and clogged arteries, cleaner than when you were born. That's what's drawing near.

And as I say that, I talked about Jesus coming last week. I talked about His coming, preaching the Kingdom of Heaven at hand, which by the way, this is all that, the Kingdom of Heaven at hand. It's the same word here. The redemption is at hand. It's coming it's near. And think about the comfort of it.

When I rest in thinking about that, I can see why I had the excitement I had around September 11th. It's not to say, again, that it was well placed or a mature excitement, but the anticipation was right on. Anticipate that coming, Christian. Your redemption is hand. Anticipate it. Pray for it. Pray for the world to have ears to hear it and join in it with us! That beautiful redemption in the arms of our Savior, who will come again, just as He came that first Christmas to be that Savior. Amen.