

Advent 1  
Luke 21:25-36  
November 29, 2009

Dear People who patiently and preparedly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word ‘signs’ is a little confusing because of where we started heading. This is over halfway through Jesus’ discussion of various signs for several different things. He talks about the signs of destruction of Jerusalem, which happened already in the year 70 A.D. He talks about signs leading up to the end of the world and universe we presently have, that will coincide with the powerful and very glorious coming of the Son of Man, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The signs spoken of here are the signs that will happen as Jesus comes again. These are not the earlier signs, which point to an eventual return of Jesus. These are signs, which will happen as Jesus returns.

Don’t let these Signs catch you unexpectedly!  
When We See These Signs, We’ll Be Seeing Our Redemption  
Drawing Near

When we think of Advent, which means ‘Coming,’ we think of a time during which we prepare to celebrate the birthday of Jesus in Bethlehem. But that’s too limited. Advent is also a time to prepare for Jesus’ final coming. Here Luke focuses us on that coming of Jesus. And he doesn’t even use the word ‘Judge.’ The judgment is going to cause much upset among all the people of the planet, but that’s not Luke’s real point. Luke is focused on the people of God living on the Earth when Jesus comes again. For them it will be a very wonderful day. When the believers in Jesus see Jesus coming on the clouds with power and great glory, Luke says they should stand and lift up their heads.

I always kind of wondered what ‘stand up and lift up your heads’ meant. When I looked at the meaning of the Greek words, it really helped me understand.

The words mean ‘stand straight (tall) or erect.’ And “lift up your heads” means “hold your heads high.”

First, Jesus talked about those other kinds of signs that are happening earlier, pointing to His eventual coming. They include religious signs, the ones Jesus talks about the most – false Christs, false prophets and the persecution of those who follow Jesus, the real Christ. They include political signs – wars, talk of wars, and revolutions. They include natural signs – famines, earthquakes, epidemics and other things that frighten and upset people.

God’s people are affected by such signs, particularly and especially the hard things, put downs, prejudices and outright persecution that does come to those who faithfully follow Jesus. But when these other signs – signs in the sun, moon, and stars – when the powers

of the heavens are shaken, when on the Earth, anguished nations, at a loss to explain the wild seas, literally passing out from fear and terror at things coming on the world – happen, God’s people should stand tall and hold their heads high. They have nothing to fear then. They can be confident! They know what it all means. Yes, heaven and Earth shall pass away, the old, ruined, sinful heaven and Earth, that is. For, then the Son of Man, our Savior, our Redeemer, shall come down from above. While the powers of the heavens are shaken, Jesus’ power will not be shaken. His power will be doing the shaking of everything else. He’ll create a new heaven and earth.

What is will mean for His faithful people is redemption, full final redemption. Redemption from all sin and death, satan and hell, not only by faith but by sight, by experience, body and soul forever. The rest of the people will have good reason to pass out from fear. Christ’s people will have no reason to. They’ll have reason to rejoice.

“All 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 tall and hold your heads high, because your redemption is drawing near,” as near as the coming Redeemer, whom you will see coming.

All the earlier signs have happened many times ever since Jesus spoke them. Even people living when Jesus first said them saw all those signs. So, the point is to be ready so that when Jesus does come on the Last Day, we will be among those able to stand tall and hold our heads high in front of Jesus, the Son of Man, to whom the Father will give an eternal kingdom make up of people from every nation, language, tribe and culture.

So, Jesus urges His people to watch for certain things. “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life.”

Our hearts need to be given over only to Jesus. Our hearts rightly belong to Him. Our thinking, our highest wishes, our priority, our interest needs to be Jesus first, foremost, always. But other things will definitely try to fill our hearts instead. Interestingly, they will weigh our hearts down. A weighed down heart doesn’t sound good, does it? Does that sound like contentment, happiness? No. It sounds like sorrow, dissatisfaction, misery.

Dissipation comes from the verb to dissipate. Dissipation is the careless, foolish throwing away of money and even self. It can involve all forms of wild living, extravagance, partying, and impulse buying. Drunkenness is mentioned separately, but is itself a form of dissipation. Maybe we should keep the word dissipation in our mind over the Black Friday weekend. Must we really pile on the presents to have a good Christmas? Really? Is that Christmas at all? Is it?

The anxieties of everyday living can take over our hearts, too, so much so that there is no place for Jesus at all. I see it happen over and over again. People go from regularly hearing God’s Word to almost never hearing it. Why? Usually they are just too busy and preoccupied with other stuff, and it is just stuff, stuff that won’t last! Without God’s Word, the faith will eventually die, leaving at best, only seldom thought about memories.

Be careful! Be always on the watch! Prayer is a great help for staying awake and for remaining on guard. Pray that you'll escape the fear and terror. Pray that God, through His Word and Sacraments, will keep and strengthen your reliance on Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God, so that on that great day you, too, will be able to stand tall with head held high, joyously anticipating receiving Jesus' gift of redemption in its most final and complete form coming with Jesus Himself in His new heavens and earth forever. Be strengthened in your daily battle with your old sinful nature, satan and the world and be strengthened in your following your new nature by power of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament such as the encouragement of these words. Amen.