

Signs of hope.

Text: Luke 21:25-36 for 12/2/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

²⁵“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. ²⁶Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” ²⁹He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹Even 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. ³³Heaven 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. ³⁵For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be 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 theme for our Advent worship this year is “He comes, bearing gifts.” And the first gift we see our Lord bringing with him is the gift of hope. But what is hope? When you have hope, it is for something you desire. I don't know of anyone who hopes to one day have a root canal. No, you hope for something you want. Like a child at Christmas hoping for a new toy or game. Along with that desire is also anticipation and waiting. Our hope is placed in something that is coming. Yet there is no guarantee that the item will be received. There is only an expectation.

And that is the difference between worldly hope and Christian hope. Hope for us as Christians is different because that for which we hope comes with a guarantee. Our Lord and Savior has given us that guarantee. To assure us that he will deliver what he has promised he has given us signs mark coming of his promised gifts. As we study these words of Christ from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus, through his words gives us ...

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- I. Lift up your head to see the signs.
- II. Use those signs to prepare.

The purpose of a sign is to give us information. The information that is found on a sign is there to give guidance and direction. Think of signs along the freeway. They tell us how far it is to the next city. Signs may point us to go in a certain direction or warn of dangerous road conditions. Road signs can tell us what exit is coming up and how far it is to the next exit. Signs help us in knowing where to go or what's coming next.

In these words of Jesus that are before us, he is speaking of the signs of his second coming. Earlier in Luke chapter 21 Jesus mentioned a long list of signs that point to his second coming. Signs such as wars, famines, and earthquakes. Those signs have all been fulfilled. But the signs Jesus mentions here seem to be signs that are yet to come. He says, **“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. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken”** (vs. 25-26). While we don't know when these signs will take place, these signs seem to be happening right before Jesus returns on Judgment Day.

Christ tells us that the reaction of most to people to these signs is going to be terror. There is going to be fear and panic because far too many people have been living in the moment instead of living for Jesus' return. People have been focused on themselves and what they want out of life instead of following God's direction for their lives. This means that most people are going to miss

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the important signs that Jesus gives pointing to his return. When they do see those signs, they are not going to understand them, so they will be terrified when they do see them.

Remember, Christ can come back at any moment. Are we living as if the end could come at any moment, or are we simply living in the moment? Like the unbelieving world it can be very easy for us to become too focused on ourselves; too focused on the things that are right in front of us. In the weeks leading up to Christmas it seems like there are so many things to focus on. We focus on our schedules: activities, parties, and family get-togethers. We focus on all our Christmas preparations: Christmas cards, Christmas gifts, and Christmas decorations. We may be excited about Jesus first coming, yet we live as if all that matters is that which is happening right now. We act as if the end isn't coming any time soon. The problem is that the more we focus on what is right in front of us the harder it becomes to keep everything straight. We are not seeing the big picture of God's plan for our lives. When problems arise, when troubles come, when unexpected pain or anxiety enters our lives it causes our life to come out of balance, especially our spiritual life.

How do we keep our lives in balance with what God demands of us? How do we do that when there is so much going on in our lives? It all has to do with where you are looking. To show you what I mean I need a volunteer. What I want the volunteer to do is to balance this yardstick on their hand. The yardstick represents your life, and as Christians we want our lives to point to God. We want our lives to line up with his will. What you need to do is balance the yardstick on the palm of your open hand. [Give them a few tries.] How hard is it to balance that stick on your hand? It all depends on where you look. If you are looking at your hand the yardstick will fall every time. To keep the stick balanced you have to look up! You have to look at the top of the yardstick so that you can properly adjust your hand and body to the movement of the stick and keep it pointing up.

The same is true of our spiritual lives. Jesus said, **“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”** (v. 28). You need to lift up your head and see the signs! Those signs that Jesus sets before us are signs of hope! We need to lift up our heads and focus on Jesus to keep our lives lined up with God's will so we can be ready for Christ's return.

How do we keep our heads up and focus on Jesus when everything in this world seems to be crumbling around us? Our Lord tells us, **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”** (v. 33). That means Jesus' promises will never pass away. Christ will never take back any promise he has ever made. What Christ has promised he will fulfill. So, what did Jesus promise us? He said, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”** (John 10:10). Jesus promised that, **“God [...] gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16). On the night before he died our Lord said of simple bread and wine, **“This is my body. This is my blood [...], which is poured out [...] for the forgiveness of sins”** (Matthew 26:26b,28). Then Jesus went to that cross and did just that. He poured out his blood to pay for all the times we sinfully lived as if Jesus was not coming back any time soon. Yet, even as he was being executed Christ said, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** (Luke 23:34). After suffering the hell our sins deserved, as Jesus completed that full payment he said, **“It is finished”** (John 19:30). With those words all sin was completely paid for, and the results of Christ's work will never pass away. Finally, speaking of his resurrection, Jesus promised, **“Because I live, you also will live”** (John 14:19).

None of these promises will ever pass away. That means the hope that you have in Jesus' forgiveness, the hope you have in his promised eternal life, is a sure and certain hope. Our Lord has promised, he will give us signs that our hope will soon be fulfilled. So, lift up your head to see the

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signs, signs that fill you with hope.

But remember, the purpose of a sign is to give you information. That information is there to help guide and direct your thoughts and actions. As Jesus sets before us these signs of hope he wants us to use these signs to prepare.

Our Lord wants us to prepare for his return. The first thing Jesus tells us to do in our preparations is to “be careful.” We need to “be careful” about keeping certain things out of our lives. Jesus says, **“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”** (v. 34). We want to keep out of our lives dissipation: It is living to excess. It is over indulging and over spending. Dissipation is needing to have everything you set your eyes on, and spending everything you have to get what you want. It is gorging oneself on the pleasures of the senses: filling oneself with food, drink, sex, or just binge watching an entire season of your favorite Netflix show. You end up weighing yourself down with all the stuff of this world. Jesus also warns of drunkenness. Not just on alcohol, but on all that life has to offer. Filling oneself up to the point where you cannot think straight or function properly. How easy it can be to become “drunk” on the Christmas season: going to every party, event and get-together. Working more to have the money to spend on Christmas gifts and parties. All these things cause anxiety in our lives. All of these takes our eyes off of Jesus and the hope he is setting before us.

That is why our Lord wants us to use his signs of hope to prepare. How do we prepare for Jesus’ final return? Our Lord says, **“Be always on the watch, and pray”** (v. 36). To watch means to be actively looking for someone or something to be approaching. Part of our watching involves looking out for the things Jesus told us to be careful of: dissipation, drunkenness, anxiety. We also want to watch out for the evil things Satan tries to trap us with and the temptations the world constantly sets before us. We are also to be watching for our Lord’s return. We want to be focused, intentionally looking for those signs of hope our Savior said he would send ahead of his return. If you want to be ready you need to be watching for Jesus to return.

Along with watching Jesus says, “Pray!” The Apostle Paul takes that even further and says, **“Pray continually”** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). What better way to keep our eyes focused on Jesus than by speaking to him directly. Pray for the strength to stand up against the temptations of this world, temptations which can distract us. Pray for the understanding of God’s will through his word. Ask your Lord for the determination to watch and be ready for his return. Pray for wisdom; the wisdom to see our Lord’s signs as signs of hope. They are signs that point us to that coming Day of eternal life. It is the unending life that Christ has guaranteed we will receive when he returns on that Last Day. Pray that you are ready for that day.

Scripture tells us that, **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”** (Hebrews 11:1). While faith does not rely on seeing, there are things we can see that fill us with hope. Wars, earthquakes, natural disasters and catastrophes: these things may cause fear and terror in the hearts of the people of this world. Yet for us they are all signs that our Lord will be returning soon. For us they are signs of hope. So lift up your heads to see those signs. And when you see them, use those signs to prepare for your coming Lord because right now he is preparing a place for you in his Father’s heavenly home. Amen.