

Luke 21:25–36, “Your Redemption Draws Near”

11/28/21 1st Sunday in Advent, (See Series C, page 71 in the Ambassador Hymnal)

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Luke 21:25–36 (NKJV)

²⁵ “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; ²⁶ men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”

²⁹ Then He spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. ³¹ So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

³⁴ “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Winter is descending upon us. The trees in my yard are bare. The leaves are all gone. Is everything dying? No, those bare branches give me hope. If you look closely you can see the promise of life: there are buds on the branches!

In the spring, each bud will unfold into a new little branch and what is now barren will be covered with green again. Winter may be closing in, but in the midst of all the ice and cold the frozen buds are preaching a sermon of hope: spring and summer are coming.

The brokenness of this world might lead us to ask the same question, “Is everything dying?” Are there any signs like the buds on a tree branch that signal a better time ahead? Yes, there are signs to look for, but they aren’t pretty like these little buds. The signs that Jesus gives point forward to something more beautiful than spring—to Christ’s return, but the signs are ugly.

In Luke chapter twenty-one, Jesus tells His disciples some terrible things that would come to pass before He returns in glory. We don’t have to be afraid of any of the signs of the end because for the Christian, no matter how the events of the end affect us, they are like buds that remind us that Jesus is coming back and our redemption is another day closer.

Before we note some of the signs from earlier in the chapter, two words of caution: first, don’t become overly interested in studying the signs. The signs are not the important thing. The important thing is that Jesus is coming back. Jesus wants you to be ready when He comes back.

If you're charting earthquakes and counting wars to closely analyze the signs, you're doing it wrong. If however you hear of an earthquake or a war and you remember that they stand as signs that Jesus will be coming back and this leads you to bow again in repentance of your sin, to believe the Gospel that Jesus forgives you, and to walk in a godly way knowing that the time is short, then you're doing it right.

The second word of caution is to not get caught up in wondering if we are in the end times or if Jesus is coming soon. The Bible definitively answers both of those questions, "yes," for us. Yes, we are in the end times. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that the end of the ages had already begun. The whole time between Jesus coming at Christmas and His second coming is called in the Bible "the end of days." And Jesus Himself says in Revelation 22:20 "Surely, I am coming quickly."

So what did Jesus tell His disciples? Luke chapter twenty-one begins with Jesus in the temple watching the widow give her two pennies into the offering. One of His disciples goes on to make a comment about the beauty of the temple and Jesus surprises them by telling them that one day the temple would be destroyed. This sparked questions about what signs the disciples could expect to see as the end of days progressed.

At least one or two of the signs were in the future for the disciples, but are in the past for us: the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (v. 6); the death of the disciples themselves (v. 16).

The other signs Jesus mentioned came to pass partially during the disciples' lives and since then the signs have been quite constant for all of humanity to see. Because of the sinfulness of people and because of the brokenness of creation, there would come to pass these signs that show we are in the last days and that remind us that Jesus is coming back: there will be lying teachers that come in Jesus' name (v. 8), wars, commotions, and tumults (v. 9–10), earthquakes, famines, and diseases (v. 11), terrifying sights and signs in the sky and space (v. 11), persecution and imprisonment of Christians for their faith (v. 12–15), betrayal of Christians by family and friends (v. 16), and Christians will be hated and killed for their faith (v. 16–17).

What do these signs mean, and what are we supposed to do about it? In the portion of Luke chapter twenty-one that is our sermon text today, Jesus refers to all those signs as "these things." Listen to what Jesus says the signs mean and what we should do about it. He said in verse 28, "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." That's not a posture of fear, but of confident hope.

What the signs mean is that your redemption draws near. Jesus, your redeemer, is coming soon. Consider natural disasters and storms like blizzards and hurricanes—these are reminders that the creation is groaning and our sinful world is broken. But they are not only reminders of our plight, they are signs that have a message for all who will see them with eyes of faith, "Your redemption draws near," the signs say.

When the tornado siren blares, what should you do? You should take evasive measures: get in the basement or in the safest place you can. God has given you your body, so find protection for your body from the storm. But God has also given you your soul. When the

tornado siren blares, tell your feet to move quickly and tell your soul to remember God's Word which tells us that this is but another sign that our Lord will be returning soon. And in the midst of whatever storm is bearing down on you physically or metaphorically, know that the Lord who will return is also the Lord who is with you now and always.

Luke chapter twenty-one is quite amazing. All the way through verse twenty-four Jesus is telling the disciples about these signs that characterize the last days. Why are the signs valuable? Because on the one hand they serve as perpetual reminders to us to be ready for Christ's return: you're ready when you repent and believe, and instead of walking in sin the fruit of your faith is your desire to love God and your neighbors according to His holy will.

On the other hand, knowing that some of the most terrifying parts of our fallen world that Jesus mentions are actually signs that our redemption draws near should help us to see any threat against us in a new light. Sure, the nations might rage and natural disasters and health disasters and relationship disasters might strike us, but even these are signs that say, "Your redemption draws near," when we see them with eyes of faith.

But when we get to verse twenty-five, Jesus doesn't seem to be referring just to signs that are part of the end of days that we've been in ever since Jesus came the first time. Here in verses 25–27, Jesus seems to be giving the signs which will happen at the very end of the end: at the return of Christ.

Listen to these signs not as events that will transpire over the course of centuries like the others, but as events that occur suddenly and simultaneously when Jesus comes back. ²⁵ "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; ²⁶ men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

Jesus gives a perfect description of the effect His return will have on creation and on the hearts of men, but it is beyond our comprehension to picture it. All we can do is hear about this old creation passing away and say, "Okay. Amen. It will be so." Did you hear how Jesus described the reaction of the one who does not believe in Jesus on the day of His return? He said, "Men's hearts [will be] failing them from fear."

Is it good news or bad news that Jesus is coming back? For the one who has rejected Jesus in unbelief, hardening his heart against the Holy Spirit's work of convicting of sins and calling to repentance, judgment day will be bad. But what about for you, dear Christian? For you who humble yourself before God, confessing your sins, believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you have a life that is not limited to this old groaning world. When the Lord returns you will do the opposite of what the unbeliever does.

In Luke 21:26 Jesus said the unbelieving hearts will fail from fear. But in Luke 21:28 Jesus said what you will do, brothers and sisters in Christ, when you see Jesus return. You'll do the same thing you are to do today when you see signs of His coming. Jesus said, "when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

At the cross Jesus bought you out of slavery to sin, death, and the devil. The redemption price He paid was His own blood to save you. So if your redemption already happened at the cross, why does Jesus say that at His return, “your redemption draws near”? It’s because the redemption you have in Him now is yours by faith, not yet by sight.

God sees you as a forgiven saint and a new creation in Christ. But when Christ returns your redemption will draw near in such a way so that you can see it too. You will not only be changed and made new, but so will all of creation. “Behold, I make all things new,” the Lord said in Revelation 21:5.

With great anticipation of the joy and grace to be revealed toward all who believe on that day, we don’t cower in fear at the thought of the end times and the Lord’s coming. Instead, we straighten up, we look up, we lift up our heads, we stand at attention and with expectation of His return, for our redemption draws near.

Having laid out many signs of His coming throughout Luke chapter twenty-one and then comforting them with the reality that they who believe will not cower in fear but lift up their heads at His return, Jesus goes on to share the parable of the buds on the Fig tree.

Jesus said in Luke 21:29–31, “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. ³¹ So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.” God is so gracious to tie His promises to so many everyday things in our lives. We are surrounded by reminders of His grace and salvation constantly if we have the eyes to see it. Every tree you see this winter with little buds on it now has become a reminder to you that your redemption draws near.

The trials of life are hard and the brokenness of the world is hard, and Jesus knows. Count these sufferings as buds on the branch and know that your redemption is drawing near. The entire purpose for Jesus to tell the disciples and you about His return is that you would be comforted in the midst of trouble.

Jesus gives more of that comfort in verses 32–33, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” Here the word “generation” clearly doesn’t mean only the people who were alive at that time, since Jesus had already told them in verse 16 that they would die before the end. Instead, “generation” is used in the sense of a kind of people, not a time range.

The kind of people that will continue on until the end, the generation that will not pass away until all the signs come to pass including the ones accompanying Christ’s return, are people of faith. It’s another way of saying that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. Jesus is saying that no matter how many die or fall away, still the generation of the faithful will remain until He returns.

But it isn’t because of your strength that you remain in the faith. Rather it is because of God’s Spirit continually working through His Word to sustain you in the faith and daily and abundantly forgive all your sins and the sins of all believers. To this end Jesus said, “Heaven and

earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” For your comfort as you wait for Christ to return, look to God’s Word. His Word is true and will never pass away. Jesus described how the heavens and earth would pass away when He returns in verses 25–27, but His Word will last forever as eternal truth.

His Word tells us how we are saved from sin and death and judgment and hell. We are saved not by our works, but by trusting in Jesus Christ who died and rose again for our salvation. His Word also tells us how He desires that we live our lives as saved people while we wait for His return. At the close of today’s text, Jesus gives this kind of instruction for His disciples and for us. He said in verse thirty-four, “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.”

Jesus wants your heart to be ready for His return. You are ready as you daily repent and believe the Gospel. Jesus knows we face temptation, so He mentions three of the things to not give our hearts to: carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life. Carousing and drunkenness go hand in hand. Drunkenness is not just a specific blood alcohol content, it is the state of no longer being in control of yourself. The world makes jokes about being drunk and celebrates it, but Jesus recognizes drunkenness as a threat to your readiness for His return. You cannot be watchful and self-controlled if you are drunk. Carousing is just the behavior associated with drunkenness.

If you are numbing your pain with drunkenness, repent and find help. Call me and I’ll pastor you and I’ll help you find help. What if you don’t drink unto drunkenness or don’t drink at all, Jesus has a caution for you too. He warned against letting your heart be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and also with the cares of this life. You all have a lot going on. Everyone is busy with a lot. You have cares in this life, and the Lord knows. The cares of life can either be something we lay before the Lord and ask Him for help and focus, or they can consume us. The drunkard is not a worse sinner than the one consumed with the cares of this life. We all must repent.

The good news, dear Christian, is that you are forgiven. Your redeemer drew near at Christmas when He was born a lowly baby and lived His humble life and died His humble death, paying for your sins. But your redeemer also rose victorious over our enemies of sin, death, and the devil, and is coming back to judge the living and the dead. You, forgiven saints, whenever you see the signs of His coming, whether they are ongoing mundane weather signs or difficult persecution signs or the trumpet blast of His return, remember the bud on the branch, look up and lift up your heads, and know that your redemption draws near.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.