

Looking Both Ways  
November 24, 2013

Last week I encouraged you to keep an eye on the past. Specifically, keep in your sight the ugly cross of that Jesus died on. He paid a terrible price for our forgiveness. We must never forget that.

The Christian must always be looking back at the cross. We celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus not just at Easter, but every day out there, and every Sunday in here. Let us make it a part of every day to remember what Jesus did for us. We must look back.

But we must also look forward. There are two primary promises to us in the New Testament. The first promise is the forgiveness of our sins. The second promise is the return of Jesus. We should remind ourselves every day of His return.

Jesus is coming again. It may be morning, may be noon, may be evening, and may be soon. God's promise to us is that Jesus is coming again. When He comes, He will gather all of His followers to Himself to be with Him forever.

We must be constantly looking back at the cross, and constantly looking ahead for His return. **Expect His return today.**

Our passage this morning has no mention of His return, but points to something that can hinder our watching for His return.

**Luke 2:41-52 (NIV)** Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When He was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking He was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him.

After three days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers.

When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what He was saying to them.

Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

I once did not know where my sons were. Most of the time that they were young, I knew where they were. I knew they were at school, or shopping with my wife, or swimming at the pool, or playing in and around our home. But one day I went to pick them up from school and they were not there. I went back to the house, driving slowly along the route

they were likely to have traveled home and did not find them. I called the school and they checked and did not find them at the school. It was at that point that I became very stressed and redoubled my prayers for their safety.

It all turned out okay. But any parent who has been through that, for more than a few minutes knows something of what Mary and Joseph were feeling when they did not find Jesus in the caravan.

As they returned to Jerusalem, you can imagine what was in their minds. "Where is he?" "Where could he be?" "What could have happened to him?" "This isn't like him at all." "Was he kidnapped?" "Is he hurt?"

Another question they might have asked if they were not so panicked is this, "Where WOULD he be?" Or we could word it this way, "From what we know of our son, where should we first look for him in Jerusalem?" You see, they evidently did not ask that last question at all. They searched the entire city, probably starting with people they knew, places they had gone to during their stay, the market, the homes of friends, some of the places that most boys would be tempted to go, like the Roman sports arena.

The most important place, the most popular sightseeing destination was the temple. It seems strange that it took them so long to get to the temple.

And that is Jesus' point. Why did you not know I would be here? If you asked yourselves, "Where would He be," you would surely have come to this conclusion. Jesus would be in the temple. "Why didn't you know to look for me in my Father's house?"

Jesus assumes they would know where He was and where to look. As it turns out He was in the last place they looked. It should have been, in Jesus' way of thinking, the FIRST place they looked.

The reason Jesus says this to them and assumes they would look for Him in the temple concerns their family story. You know that story. It is part of our annual Christmas celebration.

Remember that Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. One day an angel appeared to Mary. The angel told Mary she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and to name the child "Jesus" because He would save His people from their sins. He also would become king of Israel.

Joseph too had the same message confirmed to him by an angel in a dream. In addition to these miraculous events, we have the magi and their expensive gifts for Jesus. There were the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna. Then another angel dream warned them to flee Herod. None of that is typical of very many families.

Mary and Joseph should have wondered every day, "Will it start today? Is today the day?"

So what happened? How could Mary and Joseph ever forget these things?

While the start of their family was unusual, after they settled in Nazareth life became normal. Life became for them what it was for all of their friends and relatives. Jesus had been the perfect son. But other than that, nothing unusual had ever happened in their small village. Over time the miracles of His birth became a dim memory. They forgot what the angels told both of them. They forgot that Jesus was someone special. They forgot He was destined for someTHING special.

So when it started they weren't ready. They reacted like the parents of any normal twelve year old. The difference was that Jesus was not a normal twelve year old.

From this story I want to draw a parallel for our lives. First, **Mary and Joseph were told something significant at the beginning of their story.** We too have been told something significant at the beginning of our story. We were told that Jesus is our savior, that He died for us, was raised from the dead, ascended up into heaven, and will return one day.

Second, **Mary and Joseph knew something special was coming for Jesus... one day.** But most every day was normal. So when God initiated the new, they weren't ready.

We know something special is coming for us one day. But most every day is normal. When the signs begin for Jesus' return, will we be ready? Or will we react like normal people instead of God's people?

Our lives are normal. It is easy to forget that we are not normal people. We are part of the Kingdom of God. One day Jesus will return. But there will be signs of it before it happens. Look at what Jesus said.

**Matthew 24:4-8, 12 (NIV)** "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains...

... Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold...

In the last year we have seen one of the widest hurricanes, with winds stretching 1,100 miles wide and recently the most powerful hurricanes with sustained winds of 145 mph for ten minutes, 195 mph for one minute, and even higher as it broke the wind gauges used to measure the speed of the winds. Both natural and manmade disasters are increasing.

In addition immorality is increasing. There have always been immoral people, the dregs of society we call them. There have always been thieves, murderers, con artists, and prostitutes. We have always had those who shunned marriage and responsibility and moral social values. We have always had those who pooh-poohed the church.

But now these are not the dregs of society, but its leaders. Now it is not a minority but a growing majority. And where their values were spoken in secret, now they are published

openly for all to see and hear. It appears that God is removing His hand from the nations, allowing immorality to flourish and unbelief to flourish like never we haven't seen since the book of Judges.

Normal people are looking at the disasters and asking "Where is God in all this mess?". Christians should realize what all this mess is about. God is calling people to wake up and repent of their sins. God is slowly bringing His wrath upon the earth.

Jesus said the signs would always be present. But as they increase greatly, let us take notice. Normal people will blame some on global warming, which may or may not be a contributing factor. But make no mistake, whatever causes contribute to it, it is God's judgment upon mankind's sin.

I'm not saying the end is this week, though it could be. But we have been told that Jesus will return. Let us awaken every day and remember the cross. Let us also remember that He is coming and ask ourselves, **"Is this the day?"**

Some of you may be thinking, "Robin, it has been over 2,000 years since Jesus said those words. So His coming wasn't going to be in a short time. It could just as easily be another 2,000 years from now. Every generation of Christians has thought the time was surely close, looking at the signs in their time. Some even did ridiculous things like those who thought He was returning last year. Let's not fall victim to the same hysteria."

All that is true. But at the same time, if we explain away everything that could be a sign of His coming, our hearts will grow cold, and we won't be ready when He does return. Now **COULD** be the time. His return could be in our generation. While the signs have always been visible, there are more of them than even 50 years ago. The acceptance of immorality alone should be a wakeup call to Christians. His coming could be a long way off still. But in our time the signs are strong and we must be strong too. We must redouble our efforts at preparation and not give way to apathy.

Let us get up each morning and remember the cross, giving thanks. Let us also remind ourselves that He is coming again and ask, "Is this the day?" Then let us live as if He is returning today.