

Living Watchful Lives.

Text: Luke 21:25-36
Suggested Hymns:
17, 15, 489, 491, 493

- 1) Living watchful lives
- 2) The Second Advent is as certain as the First
- 3) The signs that support this faith
- 4) A warning and a promise
- 5) A week of watchfulness

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 21:25-36, 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 heaven 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.” (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

It would be interesting to know to what extent our mental attitudes are conditioned by the recollection of past events and to what extent they are influenced by the anticipation of future events.

Most people are agreed that our state of mind is greatly influenced by what has happened to us in the past. However, I don't think that anyone will deny that our personalities are also greatly affected by what we expect to happen.

A spirit of expectancy is an important element in a happy and healthy mental outlook. If the future stretches out before us, offering no relief from the deadly monotony of our present existence, promising neither failure nor success, neither poverty nor wealth, but only a steady repetition of our present tiresome routine of living, then we are probably very unhappy individuals who find life unadventurous, unchallenging, and uninteresting!

A spirit of expectancy can, of course, also destroy happiness. If you are among those people who, with troubled hearts and anxious minds, anticipate nothing but evil in the days that are to come, then you will find life threatening, fearful, and insecure.

All of this is true on a larger scale too. If people view human history as an endless and meaningless and monotonous succession of cultures and civilisations that rise and fall according to a senseless pattern and believe that nothing will ever interrupt this dreary cycle, then he is in the grip of that utter despair which only a materialist can know.

Such a person will be just as miserable if he shares the view of many people today that the world is relentlessly moving onward to an inevitable calamity caused by global warming, climate change or some other factor.

Then there are those who believe that one day somebody is going to blow humanity to bits with nuclear bombs and therefore see in the future of mankind nothing but disaster. These are all needless fearful anticipations which rob people of happiness and of hope.

Our text for this morning offers us a third choice. Christ does not tell us that nothing will ever happen to us or to our world, nor does He tell us that the future can bring only evil and destruction.

Rather, He tells us that our lives are moving onward to something stupendous and wonderful, that the history of the world and of humanity is pointing to a cosmic climax, and that we should therefore live expectant, hopeful, and watchful lives!

Let us examine Christ's message for us today. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Living Watchful Lives

What is this terrific thing that is going to happen to us and to our world? What is it that can possibly affect the lives of all people, the living and the dead, and bring human history to its culmination?

We referred to this event a few moments ago, perhaps without much conscious thought. We all confessed in the words of the Apostles' Creed, *from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead*. This means that on some date in the future, known only to God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who twenty centuries ago withdrew His visible presence from this world of ours, will return again to this world.

That is why we Christians are to live watchful lives. The anticipation of that glorious event is an essential part of our Christian faith. It is an indispensable part.

2. The Second Advent Is As Certain As The First

I do not need to tell you that multitudes of men and women in our time regard the idea that Jesus Christ will return to our earth with scoffing unbelief. I am not thinking exclusively of the avowed atheists and materialists of our age.

There are also many of people who while professing to believe in God, and acknowledging the value of religion, and admitting the reality of spiritual things, and having the greatest admiration for Jesus Christ, will tell you that here is where they draw the line.

They will not believe that the historical Jesus, who dwelt upon our earth, will return to this earth at the end of time. They often assume the attitude that only simple-minded people would believe something like that.

The Apostle Peter had to contend in His day with this same mockery and scorn. You remember his words as recorded in 2 Peter 3:3-4, ³ *knowing this*

first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." The modern attitude of ridicule which so often greets this doctrine of the second advent of Christ is nothing new.

It is true, and always has been true, that those who reject the second advent of Christ also reject the first advent of Christ. Those who deny the incarnation of God in Christ, and who will not believe that in Jesus the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, are the very same people who regard the second advent of Christ as an absurdity.

By the same token, those who believe that twenty centuries ago God sent forth His Son, and that in Him dwells the fullness¹ of the Godhead bodily, are the very same people who are waiting and watching for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The Signs Which Support This Faith

Jesus is always compassionately mindful of our human weakness. He is speaking to those of us who sincerely believe that He came once and will come again, but He knows that often days and weeks go by in our lives in which we scarcely give a thought to this great and glorious doctrine of our holy religion.

He knows how often we are spiritually asleep and unmindful of the imminence of His return. He knows that we must continually be reminded that at any moment the Bridegroom may come and our lamps must be ready. He calls our attention to various natural and historical phenomena which are to serve us as constant reminders of His return.

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.* Be watchful, Christ urges us, because all these events predict His second coming.

Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads. Live watchful lives. If these prophecies are to serve their purpose, we must understand their significance. I fear that sometimes we read these signs of the end, recorded in the Gospels, and our reaction to them is the very opposite of

what it should be. We tell ourselves that there have always been signs in the sun and the moon and the stars.

In ancient times there were eclipses and comets and heavenly phenomena of all kinds. Periods of distress among nations, wars and rumours of wars, are recorded on the earliest pages of human history. We tell ourselves that there have often been times when men's hearts have failed them for fear. There have always been plagues and famines and earthquakes. All of this is entirely true. The signs of the end which are described in the New Testament have been operative throughout the long history of the human race.

It is a very serious mistake, however, to assume that because many of these signs have been fulfilled, they are therefore not signs of the end. Our Lord tells us that we should understand these signs as a perpetual prophecy of His coming. He points us to the fig tree. When the leaves shoot forth in the springtime, we know that summer is approaching.

Whenever we see these signs described in our text, we should be reminded that He will most certainly return to this earth. The signs listed in the New Testament were never intended to fix the date of His coming. Rather they are to be reminders of the certainty of His coming. Every earthquake, every famine, every war, every rumour of war, every eclipse, every period of distress among nations ... should remind us to live watchful lives.

4. A Warning And A Promise

Jesus knows how important it is for us to live watchful lives, and there is a sense of urgency in His voice when He says that this day will come upon us as a *“thief in the night.”*² On that day *they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.* But it will come suddenly and unexpectedly. Our text says that *it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.* There will not be a moment's warning. Therefore take heed to yourselves, watch, and pray.

Such an attitude of constant watchfulness is not easy for us, and often we must acknowledge that we habitually think of the Judgment Day as something that could not happen to us. We find this world in which we now live very absorbing. Perhaps it even seems disturbing to us to think that this familiar world of ours, in which we work and play and buy and sell, this world in which we earn our living

and raise our families and make our money and pursue our ambitions — that this world may at any moment come to a catastrophic end.

Jesus understands our problem and therefore very earnestly warns us against the deadening effect of worldliness. ***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.*** Give heed to these words. Do not be lulled into a spiritual coma by the love for this present world, like a person who has eaten and drunk too much.

Let it be emphasised that the warning which our Lord gives us in this text is not spoken in anger, but in love. When Jesus appeals to us to live alert and watchful and prayerful lives, He is not taking the joy out of living. Do not imagine for a moment that He wants you to live in a state of fearful anticipation and constant terror.

I suspect that we sometimes think of His return in such a spirit. But that is all wrong. Certainly the imminence of His coming should move us to daily repentance and self-appraisal. Certainly it should humble us and lead us to search our own souls for any trace of disloyalty to Him or defection from His Gospel.

But He most assuredly does not want us, His chosen disciples, to live melancholy lives of gloom and worry. Jesus is not speaking here of the watchfulness of a criminal who is expecting an officer of the law, not the watchfulness of a murderer awaiting the day of execution.

Rather Jesus is speaking to us of the watchfulness of a child waiting for the return of his father, the watchfulness of a man in pain waiting for the arrival of the doctor. Our advent hope has eagerness in it, and joy and longing. Our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to perform a ministry of ransom, and through His vicarious life of perfection and His vicarious suffering and death He broke the bondage of sin and death in which we were enslaved.

Through His sacrifice on Calvary's Cross He has given to all who believe in Him the hope of life everlasting. And now He is reminding us to look with eagerness toward that great day when we shall enter into our inheritance. ***Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.*** He is urging us to live watchful lives, not because He wants to frighten us, but because He wants to save us.

5. A Week Of Watchfulness

Mindful of His divine desire to grant us the full blessings of a completed redemption and moved by His unspeakable love for us, let us examine our lives in the light of this Word of God.

Are we living watchful lives? That is the question. It will help us to answer that question if we allow ourselves to imagine that the return of Christ will take place, let us say, next Sunday morning. Imagine for a moment that a voice from heaven would announce to all the world that on next Sunday, December 12th, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth. How would we live during this coming week?

I am sure that we would change our attitude towards many things. Some of those things which clamour for our attention and lay claim to our affection would seem trivial and unimportant. During such a week we would understand that our spiritual condition is far more important than our financial condition. It would not matter at all whether we are wearing fashionable clothes, or belonging to the best clubs, or driving the newest cars.

Many of the things which now seem so tremendously important to us would not be worth a second thought. If we knew that Jesus Christ was to return to the earth on next Sunday, we would change many things in our lives. During this week we would stop doing a lot of things that we are accustomed to do. We would get rid of many habits and ambitions which we now cherish. We would give up many possessions which we would not want Christ to find in our keeping.

I feel certain that we would probably do more mission work in that week than we have done in a lifetime, and we would certainly begin at home and among our friends and loved ones who do not believe in Christ as their Saviour. Oh, how we would plead with them to believe the Gospel!

During those last days we certainly would not find it necessary to urge people to come to the house of God. The churches of Christendom would be crowded with men and women with a sudden thirst for more revelation, and multitudes would be on their knees confessing their sins, and we would be among them.

Speaking for us Christians, I am confident that during such a week we would thank God as never before that He has given us *“His only begotten Son, that*

whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”³ Yes, if we knew that Jesus Christ was to return to this earth next Sunday morning, we would indeed *“look up and lift up our heads,”* for we would know that *“our redemption draws near.”*

If the Lord God said to us this morning, next Sunday Jesus Christ will return to judge the living and the dead, then you and I would live through a week of soul-searching repentance, a week of joyous anticipation, a week of service, of worship, and of prayer.

It is the purpose of our text to encourage us to live like this, not for a week, but for a lifetime. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Colossians 2:9

² 2 Peter 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:2

³ John 3:16