

Luke 21:25 -36

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. ²⁶People 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“Truly I tell you, 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 carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵For it will come on 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.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

⁹How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? ¹⁰Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. ¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our LORD Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹²May the LORD make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our LORD Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, our strength, and our redeemer.

We are not living through an easy time at present with the COVID virus affecting our lives so much.

There have been earthquakes and, so far this year, 49 volcanoes have either erupted or are showing signs of activity. There have been massive storms and hurricanes.

It is not quite as the text from Luke says but nations are in anguish and we are all wondering what is going on.

Many may be asking: Is it's the Judgment? Is Jesus on His way?

None of us know but we do worry. That is a human trait. There is, in fact, a worry gene. It is a mutated gene but it is there.

Personally, I would welcome Jesus coming. I know I am not perfect but I believe that I am ready.

This is something each of us has to consider.

Am I ready?

Am I ready to stand up and lift up my head to face Jesus?

Jesus went on in this text to say in verse 32: ³“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

It is difficult to interpret these words simply from the text. If we read the preceding passages of Luke, in verses 9 to 11, there is references to what seems to be happening today. In verse 30, however, Jerusalem is mentioned and these verses may refer to the coming destruction of that city by Rome, less than 40 years hence, and 40 years was regarded as a generation.

Then comes the warning in verses 34 to 36.

³⁴“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵For it will come on 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.

This is a warning for all generations. It is a warning for today. We live in a world that is trying to deny Jesus Christ. We live in a world that is glutted with idols – homes, cars, dubious heroes, and materialism. Increasingly God, Jesus and the Bible are being relegated to the sidelines. People want the good life, which is not good by Christian standards and they are being derided.

It is forgotten that things do come upon us without warning. In the summer of 2019 and 2020, who would have believed that COVID and all the suffering it has caused would appear.

Negative things occur but so do positive things. At all times we must be alert. We must not be stupefied with, as the text says, carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life.

I am not speaking theory here. As I prepared this sermon I was weighed down with shingles, in pain and, at times, with depression. It was lockdown and, on some days, I spoke to no one. There have been nights when I slept poorly, waking, and worrying.

Yet, I have not been totally alone. We never are for God is with us all at all times, only if we will hear him.

As I have lain there the words of hymns have entered my mind. One particularly resonates. It is a hymn from my childhood and, I hope, most of you. It only the first verse however that is enough.

*Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong.*

We are all little ones to God.

These are words of hope.

But what of the text from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians?

It is far different from the text from Luke. It is a text of rejoicing. Paul is exultant. He is thankful to God over the faithfulness of the Thessalonians. He prays that God will clear the way for him to visit them. He prays that God will strengthen their faith and their love for each other and for the day Jesus will come.

Luke's text is of the warnings Jesus gave however there is hope in them. Jesus says "Be careful." It is a phrase of warning yet there is a sense of hope. It is Jesus' hope for those He came to save, not just those who heard Him, but of all humankind, present and future, and to each of us.

Be careful in how you live, what you say, and what you do. Add into that, be careful to seek repentance for the sins you commit, and acknowledge that there may be sins you have committed unknowingly. They will not be unknown to God.

Paul's letter is of the joy of knowing that there are people of strong faith among the Thessalonians.

It is hope achieved and hope for continuance of faith.

There are many mentions of hope in the Bible. I will quote only two.

The first is also from 1 Thessalonians:

² We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second is from Isaiah:

³¹but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

It is so easy to become weary. We see stories in the media, negative stories, stories of violence, stories of hate, stories of abuse, and stories of people being cheated of their savings through scams. They wear us down.

Yet, sometimes there comes a story that fills us with joy. One came this month.

Did we all not cringe when we heard that a four-year-old girl had been abducted?

Did we all not fear the worst?

Then came the news – She’s alive!

I don’t know about you but I felt the prick of tears at that moment.

I have no doubt a nation prayed and the prayers were answered.

We felt joy. How much more must God feel joy when someone who has sinned comes to repentance?

It is at times like these that many, if not most, people pray. They may not know Jesus but they will know the love for a child. If only such people could lift their eyes towards God and Jesus.

That is something that we who follow Jesus must pray for every day, perhaps several times a day – that eyes will lift and hearts will open. We all know people who are good people and who do much to help others yet do not accept Jesus in their hearts. We must persevere in hope that one day our quiet prayers will bear fruit.

Paul uses the word labour. To many people that will conjure up images of sweat and strain, of exertion, trouble and suffering. Yet prayer can be exertion. Jesus, praying in the Garden of Gethsemene is said in Luke 22:44 –

⁴And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

I doubt if many of us has prayed to that depth of intensity yet, no doubt, all of us have been in despair at some point in our lives. I know that I have.

Yet, we have endured that and are still here today. That we are so is a measure of God’s love for us and our willingness to hear.

David spoke of this despair in the Psalms he wrote. Psalm 10: 1 –

¹ Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

and Psalm 13: 1-2 –

- ^{1.} How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*
- ^{2.} How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will ...*
- ^{3.} Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death*

Yet God does answer and we must work in faith, labour in love and endure in hope.

The Thessalonians were faithful workers for the Lord yet, from Paul's letter, there seems to have been something amiss for he writes in verse 10 that –

¹⁰Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

We wonder what was amiss in the faith of the Thessalonians. We are not told. Yet we do need to ask – is there anything amiss in our faith?

Is there something missing that we must seek guidance to remedy?

Have we left something undone?

Are we at odds with someone we know?

Are there people around each of us with whom we are irritated?

Are there people around us who we have irritated?

We come back to verses 12 and 13 of 1 Thessalonians 3 –

¹²May the LORD make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our LORD Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

I will end in another prayer.

Almighty God,
give us such a vision of your purpose
and such an assurance of your love and power
that we may ever hold fast the hope
which is in Jesus Christ our Lord
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever,

Amen