

**Are You Watching?**  
**A Sermon Based on Luke 21:25-36**

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It can be scary and confusing for some of us when we read some of the texts that describe the end times or the Second Coming of Jesus, as in Luke 21-25-26. Part of the reason is that we relate Jesus' second coming mainly with judgment and destruction rather than with redemption and restoration. I remember in my school days people were afraid for the year 2000 to arrive. I heard people talking about the year 2000, or Y2K, as if this was going to be end of the world or the crash of all computers—or the Second Coming of Jesus. In one sense, it scared me as a school student to think about it, but at the same time it made me ponder what would happen with all the things that exist in this world. What would happen with this world when everyone was gone? Who would inhabit the world? Some people even said, "What's the point of going to school if the world will really end by the year 2000?" Later in my life, one of my college friends told me that he got confirmed and became a communicant member of the church in the year 1999 mainly because he was afraid of what would happen in 2000.

We often shy away from talking about the end times because it just creates fear in our lives. We can sense this fear in the disciples here in Luke 21, especially when Jesus informed them of all the signs that would take place before the Son of Man returns. When they heard Jesus talk about the destruction of the Temple, the disciples couldn't help but ask Jesus, "When will this happen?" Christians throughout the centuries have long been waiting for this event, when Christ will come to establish God's Kingdom here on earth. Christians throughout the centuries have been looking for signs and have even at times predicted when they thought Christ's second coming might occur.

In our passage from Luke, it is interesting to note that Jesus himself was very vague with his disciples about when the Son of Man would return. Our passage is part of the answer Jesus gave after his disciples asked the question, in the beginning of this chapter, "When will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" Their question came after Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple. But it seems to me that the disciples were more concerned about the *when* of this event than the event itself. Jesus doesn't really answer their question. Instead, he tells the Parable of the Fig Tree, in the heart of our text. In this parable, Jesus basically tells them that we know summer is approaching when we see the appearance of the leaves on the trees; so also we can know that the Kingdom of God is at hand when all the events he's just outlined begin to happen—despair among nations, wars, violence, hatred, persecutions, chaos surrounding the whole of creation. All these things Jesus said would serve as signs of the coming of the Son of Man.

We cannot deny the sense that we are in the midst of end times. From wars among nations, violence against the innocent and marginalized of society, killing and persecution in the name of religion, hatred and prejudice toward those who are different, famine and disease that kills millions of people in the world—yes, all these things give us the distinct feeling that we are in the midst of end times, that perhaps these are the signs and symbols Jesus is talking about. But the truth is, these signs don't seem to be what is important to Jesus. Yes, Jesus predicted that all these things would happen before the return of the Son of Man; but in some ways it seems as though Jesus was more interested in *how to live in the meantime*. He shifts the disciples' attention from *when* all these things will happen to how they should live *while* all these things are happening. Jesus encouraged his disciples that even when all these

horrible things are going on, they don't need to be afraid—rather, they should “stand up and raise [their] heads.” Jesus is telling the disciples and us that *when* the Son of Man comes isn't as important as *how we wait* in the meantime. Sometimes we feel impatient and focus on the *when*, but Jesus wants us to focus on what we are doing in this waiting period.

It is easy to look on all these things in fear, but Jesus tells us, “Your redemption draws near.” This isn't something to tremble and be afraid of; rather, we should stand up and look on with anticipation and hope, for our redemption is near. It is important also to notice that the occurrence of all these things means the Kingdom of God is near—meaning God is close by. Indeed, God has not abandoned his people but is close to us.

In this passage from Luke we learn that watchfulness is not only about being on the lookout but also about the character and behavior of the disciples' community while they are waiting. Jesus instructs us not to get mixed up with overindulgence on the one side and anxiety on the other. If we live completely carefree and fearless, we can start to feel as though the way we live doesn't matter. We can think, “I can do whatever I want and indulge in whatever I want and it doesn't matter.” But Jesus tells us to avoid a life of overindulgence and drunkenness and to live a life that is upright. As Christ's disciples, we shouldn't live our lives driven by what feels good, but instead should aim to live a life that represents what our Lord and Savior stands for. At the same time, we can't be so consumed with worry of judgment that we aren't able to live boldly for Christ. We shouldn't sit counting the signs and worrying about the future or our loved ones future, but instead we should focus our attention on loving God and loving our neighbor. Each one of us needs to find that balance between being so carefree that we don't think our actions matter or make a difference, and being so worried about our actions that we are paralyzed by fear. We are to live confidently, anticipating Christ's return.

Brothers and sisters, it may be hard to see, but there is a deep hope in this passage—a hope that all the suffering of this world will pass away and the light of Christ will shine brightly. For God is near, and there is nothing to fear, for redemption is at hand. We are to live boldly into that hope. We are to take risks and have courage to do great things for our Lord and Savior. As individuals and as churches, we are to live so boldly that we no longer fear losing our lives or the closing of our church's doors, because our ultimate destiny is in Jesus Christ. Amid the chaos and struggles that surround us, as Christians we should not live in fear, but with hope, knowing that Christ will set things right. What are *you* afraid of? How is Christ telling *you* to push beyond the limits of your fear to live more faithfully?

You know, some people go to great lengths to put world events alongside what the Bible says about the end times. Then they predict the year the end of times will come. But for Christ himself, the *when* isn't what is important. No—for Christ, how we choose to live in this waiting period is far more important. Even when the world tells us to live in fear of outsiders, how are we going to welcome the stranger in? When the world tells us there aren't enough resources and we should stockpile all our belongings, how are we going to live generously? When people say faith in God doesn't matter, how are we going to witness to the deep strength God gives us to face tomorrow? Yes, friends, we have hope and no longer need to live in fear, for God is abiding close to us, and redemption is near, when tears and sorrow will be no more. Amen.