

LIVING ALERT AND FULL OF HOPE



Reading:

Luke 21:25-28; 34-36 (NLT)

(Assign someone to read.)

"And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then everyone will see the Son of Man[e] coming on a cloud with power and great glory.[f] So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!" ... "

Watch out! Don't let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don't let that day catch you unaware, like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man."



Reflection

This year, our Advent journey begins in Luke 21 as Jesus teaches in the temple. Early in the chapter, Jesus speaks to His disciples about events that will happen in the future. The disciples respond with a question: "Teacher, when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to take place?" (v. 7).

Previously, in Luke 11:16, Jesus' opponents had asked Him for a miraculous sign from heaven to convince them to believe in Him. For these opponents, Jesus' words and miracles were not enough; they needed extraordinary signs to believe. Now, it is His disciples asking for signs to recognize the events leading to His return so they can be prepared.

It's interesting that this desire of the disciples has persisted through every generation, including our own. Many Christians focus on identifying signs, consumed with figuring out when the events related to Christ's second coming will occur. Unfortunately, this obsession with understanding everything about Christ's second coming—focusing too much on a future event beyond our control—has often alienated the Church from its prophetic role in the present.

This is why Jesus categorically warns His disciples not to believe the many who will come "in my name," or "usurping my name" (Jerusalem Bible, fifth edition), claiming that "the time has come" or "it is near."

Later, Jesus speaks about various events that will occur before the end (v. 7-36). Many Christians interpret these verses as a kind of roadmap or program of future events, similar to a TV guide that outlines what's coming next so we can predict the end (González, p. 237). The main problem with this view is that it contradicts Jesus' many warnings in the Gospels and Acts that it is impossible to know when the end will come (Luke 12:35-40; Acts 1:7).

When approaching these verses, instead of focusing on specific details and signs indicating Jesus' return, we should focus on what we can control: the conduct we must uphold as Christ's followers while we await His return.

IN VERSES 34 TO 36

we find two significant points about the coming of the Son of Man. First, we are told He will come on a cloud, reminding us of Acts 1:9-11, where the disciples see Jesus' ascending to heaven on a cloud, followed by a voice saying, "Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!

"The wonderful thing is that you and I are preparing to celebrate the event of the birth of that Jesus, who then grew up and preached the good news that the Kingdom of God had drawn near, died and rose again, and was finally lifted up in the clouds, but not before making us the promise that He would return. When? We don't know, and that's not what matters. What matters is that we wait with joy and expectation, filled with hope, knowing that His return will signify the restoration of all things. Therefore, instead of isolating ourselves or retreating to ensure we're ready for His return, we focus on living lives fully invested in sharing the good news of salvation, redemption, and restoration in Christ.

The second significant point in verses 25 to 28 is the contrast between the common reaction and the attitude expected of Jesus' disciples.

"People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth," but to His disciples, He says, "stand and look up, for your salvation is near!" It's saddening to see many Christians anxious and fearful about current events when we, of all people, should stand firm and look up, confident that Jesus' return means the salvation and restoration of all creation. Jesus' first coming, His life, and His victory over death form the foundation of our hope in His second coming. Verses 34 to 36 urge us to stay alert and vigilant as we await that day. On this first Sunday of Advent, we begin our journey with hope, remaining alert and watchful. As we eagerly anticipate Christ's return, we also rejoice in the approach of celebrating Jesus' birth—that moment when God became flesh and drew near to humanity.

PREPARE TO WORSHIP

Turn off all the lights

The first Advent candle is the Prophet's Candle (violet), symbolizing Hope. Today, as we joyfully celebrate God's incarnation in Christ, we receive with hope and joy the promise that Christ will come again. This is why we light a candle of hope today—a light to guide others toward the God of all hope. The best way to begin this season is by giving thanks that Jesus has already come and, filled with hope, proclaiming that He will return to restore all things.

Light a violet candle

Our Advent journey begins in near-total darkness. Yet, seeing how this faint flame begins to dispel the shadows should inspire us to have hope in Him who is our perfect light even amidst darkness. In worship and as one family, we have lit the Prophet's Candle, symbolizing hope. This reminds us that we are sent into this world to be living examples of the hope found in Christ. The challenge for us is to be bearers of hope for unbelievers. Let us begin our journey to Bethlehem with the words of the psalmist in Psalm 62:5: "Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him."

Extinguish the candles.

Conclude with a prayer together. Assign someone to lead the prayer.

Bibliography

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