

The Day is Near

Luke 21:25–36 ²⁵[Jesus said:] “There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.

³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

³⁵For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 You have lots of time. This day is your own to do with as you please. You may indulge in the materialism of the secular holiday season. You may store up treasures for yourself before moth and rust can get at them. You may enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this life: the self-indulgence, the negligent parenting, the childhood rebellion, the wandering eyes and unfaithful hands, the overindulgence in the fruit of the vine, the pursuit of success, the workaholism, the jealousy, the greed, the sin du jour. Do these things, indulge yourself while there is still time.

2 Bow down, not before the Lord in repentance, but at the altars of the gods of immediacy. Worship the things that can give you instant gratification: television, video games, shopping sprees, weblogs and chatrooms. Worship those gods that pander to your needs, the preachers who scratch your ears, the priests of pluralism, the false shepherds who lead you where your money is best spent. Worship yourself, addressing your own needs and living for the here-and-now. Let your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life. And whatever you do, do not repent.

3 Do not repent. Unless of course the signs of which Jesus speaks, the signs of the approach of the day of His return begin to happen. Not until you see on the earth the distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and waves, not until you see people fainting in fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world. Yes, yes, heaven and earth may pass away eventually, but for now at least, until you start to see these signs, relax. Enjoy your spiritual sleep while remaining awake and attentive to the world. Do not repent; you have lots of time.

4 Or not. These signs are all around. Nations—even this nation—are perplexed at their inability to control their surroundings. The sea and waves roar, rising and falling, threatening and taking life. People faint with fear and forbidding, rushing to buy the newest pill to stop the fearful onset of age or fanciest gadget to guard against the world outside. Fear and foreboding are the normal way of life for most people all around. The fig tree is heavy with buds. The day is near. And if you let your heart be weighed down with the cares of this life, the day of the Lord's return will come upon you, as Jesus says, suddenly like a trap.

5 So repent. Repent of seeking after the cares of this life more than the cares of the life eternal. Repent of making your own needs more of a priority than the needs of your neighbor. Repent of giving into the thinking that sin is a fun pastime. Repent of thinking that the day of the Lord's return is far, far off. Repenting of supposing that your time until then is your own.

6 The day is near. Straighten up and raise your heads; every day that passes is closer than the last to the day of the Lord's return. Today is one day nearer to the return of the Lord than yesterday was. And tomorrow may never come. The day is surely drawing near.

7 But this day need not cause you alarm. The Lord describes it not as the day of judgment, but as the day of your redemption. The day certainly would have brought you

judgment had judgment not already happened. The One for whose return we hope is the One who already came once. He came not as the judge but as the object of God's judgment. He came judged and condemned to die. And die He did. He died upon a cross with the weight of your sin, the weight of the world's sin placed upon Him. And the judgment of a righteous God against sinners was levied against Him instead of you. Since He has given to you the gift of His righteousness by gifting you with faith in Him, the day that draws near heralds not judgment but redemption for you.

8 For those who have not been given this gift of faith, those who persist in their rebellion against the one, true God, those who try to approach the Heavenly Father by any other means than through His Son, Jesus Christ, this will be a terrible day. But not for you. This will be a joyous day for you. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not the Word of the Lord. It will never pass away. And He has spoken that Word to you in the Waters of Holy Baptism. He has spoken the word of His name and the promise of salvation to you. He has claimed you as His own, and that word will not pass away. As the Lord by His word gives you sorrow and repentance for your sin, He speaks another word. He speaks the word to you that wipes sin from His memory: forgiven. This word, too, remains forever. And the Word which became flesh, Jesus Christ, in a few short moments will give you the the Word-made-flesh to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of your sins. This word, too, will not pass away.

9 "Stir up our hearts," you prayed in the collect today. That's a prayer to be kept awake, to have your heart continually stirred with the gift of faith. And this your Lord certainly does. He stirs your heart to receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, to hear His word preached, to hear forgiveness pronounced, to be fed with His Body and Blood. He stirs your hearts to continue to receive these gifts, proven simply by the fact that He has gathered you with His people today. He has answered this prayer. And He will continue to do so until the day of the Lord's return.

10 The day for which we hope is ever nearer. Straighten up and raise your heads. Your redemption is drawing near. He will deliver you from sin, from death, from sickness, from sorrow. His return will be the end of all these things that would entice you into sleep. It is the day of your redemption. And that day is nearer now than it was before. Amen. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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