

Jesus' Advent Directives

1st Sun. in Advent – 11/28/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 21:25-36 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 35 [Jesus directs all believers,] **“But 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.”**

Introduction

✘ November 28th – three days after Thanksgiving and what do we see in the shops and stores? Actually what have we seen now for a number of weeks in the shops and stores – both brick and mortar and online? Signs that people are getting ready for the coming of the celebration of Christmas.

→ And they're doing it all, along with the majority of our world, with the end goal (if we're talking about the businesses) of making as much money as possible, or (if we're talking about individuals) with the end goal of getting and giving more stuff to one another. Yes, though everyone tries to deny it, most of the time, the goal is also to earn “brownie points” with our kids or spouse or boss or friends by throwing the best Christmas party or giving the best gifts; gifts that will give us influence and status in the eyes of those around us.

✘ But we Christians ... we don't do any of that do we? At least we know we shouldn't have those kinds of agendas or attitudes as we enter into the Advent season, right?

→ No, this is the time before Christmas, when God, in His Word teaches us, and shows us a different set of signs; signs that are so much more important than the ones in our stores right now. As we see the signs pointing us to the coming of Jesus at Christmas, these are the signs that Jesus Himself has given us about His second coming at the end of all time.

I. The Hearers Identified

✘ In today's Gospel Reading, Jesus makes a point of getting our attention. In verse 25 He says, “There will be signs...”. In verse 29 He tells us a parable that starts out saying, “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees”. And in verse 34 He's firm when He says, “But watch yourselves...”.

→ Three times the Son of God specifically tells His hearers, to perk up and pay attention, because what He has to teach is a message of extreme importance.

✘ But who are the hearers? This is the last public time that Jesus is “teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel” (Lk. 20:1) before we then hear of the plot to betray and kill Him. In this sermon Jesus speaks words of warning directly against the Scribes and other Jewish leaders.

→ So He's not addressing the unbelievers, but those who are His faithful followers; His disciples before Him in the temple but also His disciples gathered around His Word here this moment in worship. Jesus is talking directly to you and me, folks.

→ And that means that He is addressing people who are by nature sinful to the core; easily influenced by the cares and temptations of life in this world, but also sinners who have been justified by grace through faith in the redeeming work of His blood shed to cover our sins; those adopted into His family of faith by His washing and regeneration work in baptism.

→ Bottom line: Jesus' hearers are both Saint and sinner; believers who love Jesus yet still continue to struggle with the temptations and traps of the devil, the world and our own sinful desire.

II. The dangers we face

- ⊗ As Jesus gives us His Words of warning and promise to help us remain prepared for the end of this earthly life, He speaks to two primary dangers that we will face. It's not a matter of "if" we face these dangers, but "because" we face them that Jesus lays out a series of Advent directives for us to take seriously.
 - ➔ He says in verse 34 that one of the dangers is that our hearts will become "weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life". And secondly that the day of His return will "come upon [us] suddenly like a trap".
- ⊗ Now, there's a fine line that we believers must follow as we listen to Jesus here and consider His directives. On the one hand, as Jesus talks about the signs in this world that indicate His return is imminently close, one could be very easily tempted to respond with great anxiety and despair.
 - ➔ I mean, the heavens shaking, the earth in chaos like the storm-tossed sea, nations filled with distress and perplexity, with people fainting from fear – those are the kinds of things that can lead even believers in Christ to become anxious and uncertain about their salvation.
 - ➔ But that is the exact opposite of Jesus' intention here. Your salvation depends 100% upon Jesus and His death and resurrection for you. When you believe completely in Him and His saving sacrifice in your place, your salvation is secure, no matter what is falling apart around you or who is trying to convince you of some false teaching. As Psalm 46:2 says, "Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea".
- ⊗ No, these words from Jesus are the perfect words for us at the beginning of Advent, because they serve to aid us in our preparation for the coming of Jesus by admonishing us to a dedicated time of self-inspection; an opportunity to evaluate our lives as God's people in light of the fact that He will return as promised.
 - ➔ Jesus gives these words of warning because He loves you and me so much that He wants us with Him forever. He wants to protect us from the very real possibility of eternal torture and separation from Him as our Savior.

III. Three Advent Directives

- ⊗ Jesus gives us three primary directives. The first is in verse 34. Jesus says, "Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life".
 - ➔ He lists three examples of things that commonly weigh down our hearts. This is not just feeling a little glum. No, these are things that can actually take ahold of our lives so that our priorities become clouded and confused and eventually focused entirely away from Jesus.
- ⊗ The Greek word that is translated as "dissipation" is κραιπάλη (kraipalé) and it is used to describe the nausea and headache that follows a time of intoxication. He's talking here about suffering from a spiritual hangover from all of the sinful indulgences and addictions of this world.
 - ➔ You've heard me say it before, "we are all addicts – addicted to sin" because even as we know we shouldn't be indulging in things like gambling or too much drink or trying to gain more money or power or clothes, or cars, or excessive electronic gadgetry or trips or food or ... whatever else it is that we can't stop thinking about; that we can't put aside and spend more time in word and worship and prayer with our Savior – these are the things and priorities that give us a sin-hangover; the things that work to take our eyes off Jesus so that we are spiritually sick and at risk of totally missing Jesus when He returns.

→ Jesus talked more about the "cares of this life" when they gain too much importance in Matthew 6:25-34 when He said, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

→ Anxiety or worry is perhaps the devil's favorite tool to use against us Christians; using all of our worries to try and get our focus off of Jesus so that when He comes we are not ready and as verse 34 says, we end up caught by surprise in the "trap" of unbelief.

✘ The second directive is in the first part of verse 36. Jesus says, "But stay awake at all times." That means stay alert; be ready in your faith. Why? because as Jesus says in Mark 13:33, "Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come". But why is that so important? because there is an enemy out there in the world who 1 Peter 5:8 identifies saying, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour".

✘ The third directive continues in verse 36, "...praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place...". When Jesus talks here about "praying", He's addressing a most important principle for all of us as believers. We must always remain in a regular focus and communication with our Lord!

→ Why? Because the one who closes the lines of communication is well on his/her way to closing the heart to faith and salvation all together. Think about all the places and avenues that Jesus has given us to communicate with Him – prayer: both personal and public in worship, as well as our personal devotion time and our attendance in weekly worship AND Bible study.

→ Jesus refers to this in verses 32-33. He wants our attention. He says, "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away". The "generation" that He's talking about is the long history of those who have rejected Him as Son of God and Savior. They and the world and the trappings of sinful priorities will remain always before us, urging us to come their way; tempting us to turn away from Jesus. And Jesus tells us, that they will always be around until the day when heaven and earth pass away. It's then that the trap will close and they will be forever condemned to hell. However, He tells us there's one thing; one way to remain connected to Him for salvation – that is through His Words of truth and grace; they "will not pass away".

✘ This is a hugely important directive from Jesus Himself to be active in reading and studying and living in God's Word. Because every little step away; every excuse becomes one more door closed in the Holy Spirit's face and one more opening for the devil to wiggle his way into our hearts.

→ In Matthew 26:41 Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak". Jesus is of course right, our flesh is weak. "But that won't happen to me, Jesus", you might say, "I don't need to be in worship every week (as if

God's 3rd Commandment somehow applies to everyone but me)". Or "I don't need to stick around for Bible Study and Sunday School and learn more from my Savior because, Hey, I'm already confirmed. I've got other things to do that are more important". Really? I'll let you have that conversation with Jesus directly, to see if He agrees that your "things" are actually more important than reading and learning and discussing His Word in Scripture.

- ✘ In verse 36 Jesus says that these are the things God has given to His people "that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place" as He comes again on the final day.

Conclusion

- ✘ You see, that's what all of this is about. It is the end goal; God's ultimate purpose and desired result – that you and I will be awake and ready for Jesus when He comes again. As verse 36 closes, that we "be made to stand before the Son of Man".
 - ➔ This is the goal of all of Jesus' teaching and preaching. This is the reason that Jesus came as a baby, born of the Virgin Mary. This is why He suffered and went to the cross; why He rose from the dead in victory over sin and Satan; so that you and I will be able to stand before Him on His throne on Judgement Day.
 - ➔ We don't deserve to have that right. Malachi 3:2 asks, "But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?" On our own, none of us can do it!
 - ➔ Yet the Christian who is equipped by God; who wears the armor that the Spirit gives us at Baptism and that Jesus made possible by His blood, is made able by Him and Him alone. Ephesians 6:13-14, 17 gives us this encouragement and promise, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness ... and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God".
- ✘ Paul says in Philippians 1:6, "I am sure of this, that He who began this good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Amen.