

**“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, LOOK UP, because your redemption is drawing near”**

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking up is nothing new to us, we do it all the time. We look up to check the weather to see what clouds are out there, fair weather or rain. What direction is the wind coming from. If we can see the mountains, it should be a good day. Having spent some time in Iowa it was critical to keep looking up in certain weather conditions. If the sky turned grayish green and the clouds were starting to rotate it was time to head for cover.

This time of year, you can hear the occasional honk of a goose, look up and know he’s a late starter heading south. Whenever I hear the sound of an airplane just have to look up to see what it is, how high, what direction is it going. Long time habit, in our world today think of the folks who are looking up to check for destructive drones or incoming rockets. Or maybe South Koreans wondering what Kim of the North may be sending their way. We do look up for a lot of reasons. One more. Was anyone out of bed at 3 in the morning on last Tuesday to see the lunar eclipse? Spectacular stuff.

Biblically, historically we can pinpoint heroes of the faith who looked up, sometimes in wonder, sometimes in confusion, almost always with questions. Think of Noah, receiving that directive looking up raising his hands and asking, ‘You want me to do what? Build an Ark? Or Abraham asking “Did I hear You right? Sacrifice my only son, my heir? Tough question but faith won out. Or how about Moses. He had a moment at the Burning Bush before heading back into Egypt where he was a wanted man. Or picture him standing on the shore of the Red Sea with an expanse of water in front and a murderous army behind, looking up with a staff in hand. Doing what??? Praying for help and trusting God would provide it.

We can go on and on about these heroes of the faith who turned their eyes to the sky for answers to their questions, for support in that moment. Whether OT prophets or NT apostles or just ordinary folks whom God chose for a unique or special purpose.

What of a very young woman named Mary or a puzzled Joseph, both of whom looked up surprised, or confused and still believed. Consider Peter stepping out of a boat to walk to Jesus. It was when he looked away that he wavered, became fearful, began to sink. Jesus caught him and its this same Peter who would later confess and declare for all time, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’

Paul finally saw the Light after he was blinded by it, Looked Up, recognized the Christ and took His good news to many places. We just celebrated Reformation. Do you think Luther looked up in gratitude when he realized the truth of Gods Word that was always there. By grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it’s a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast’. And again, ‘The just shall live by faith’ You can bet he looked up in deep thankfulness and sincere gratitude.

We get it, they were people called and empowered by God for a sometimes unique and special purpose. All true. But not only them. We are encouraged to Look Up as well. In the Gospel lesson for today Jesus was asked about the signs of the end times and what were they to expect. He spoke a litany of disasters, events, happenings that sound ever so real in our present time. I suspect that most every generation in the past 2000 years has felt the same way. The end is near. Look at the signs. Not yet.

Conquering and cruel armies in the early centuries. Sickness and plagues in the middles ages. Not yet. The first world war must have seemed like the end especially to those in the trenches of Europe. We just celebrated the end of that conflict. Think of WW II and its effect on untold millions. A flash in the sky above Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was Armageddon for thousands but still not yet. The world we live in today, the signs are there, and fear may be the common denominator.

But in all that conversation that Jesus had with His disciples notice where He ended up. Whatever you see, whatever you hear, whatever you feel, whatever you fear, “Look Up and know that your redemption draws near”

Consider the thought. Was Jesus also thinking beyond the obvious, beyond the outward signs. Every individual, every one of us, has something that may hurt our body, disturb our mind, or torment our soul in one degree or another. Our own end time in various ways can affect our body mind or spirit. Jesus says Look Up and know that I am here to love, to support, to empower you, First look up at His cross where the ultimate sacrifice was made for each of us. Look into the empty tomb and know that death itself has been defeated.... and then, when the time is right Look Up and see His open arms ready to welcome you home.

The bottom line is that today or any day is not really the end. While we experience the wonder and joys of this life or the pain or the tears or the heartache of this life there is more to come. We may have much joy and happiness now and thank God for that. Or we may or will have some degree of pain and sorrow .... But its not the end. There is more to come.

If aging does anything it teaches you that. No doubt. There will be an end time. God in His Word has said that. But each of us may have an end time before that moment arrives. The directive and the promise is still the same. ‘Look Up and know that your redemption draws near’ Look into the face of the Son of God sent for each of us. Identified in many beautiful ways as the Good Shepherd, the Light of the world, the Resurrection, and the Life, for now and for eternity. That’s the kicker. There is more to come.

Don’t misunderstand. We have a life to live. A gift of God through that miracle we call birth. Whatever that life may be or how we choose to live it, there is more to come. Jesus says, LOOK UP, see Me, trust in Me, believe in Me. I’m here for you Sometimes that’s hard to see but faith believes when its hard to see, I have a favorite verse from Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 2. His inspired words looked beyond the moment, the present time, our present time, any time for that matter. He writes, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him’ That’s the final word. LOOK UP. TRUST. BELIEVE IN HIM. The best, really the best is yet to come.

God help us all to own such faith. Now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts and minds and eyes on Christ Jesus our Lord.

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