

Pentecost 23 / November 16, 2025

Luke 21:28

"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Raise Your Heads, Your Redemption Draws Near

Sounds scary, doesn't it? Distress upon the earth. Wars, pestilence and famine. The oceans rising, the stars falling, the earth shaking. Imagine the special effects in that movie. But, it's not a movie, its real! These are things that Jesus says will happen throughout time as a prelude to His return; a call for repentance to the nations, a warning for watchfulness to the faithful and a sign of the truthfulness of His promise to return, make all things new and give believers a share in His resurrection to a new and eternal life. But let me ask, if you had a choice, would you prefer to have front row seats to see the fulfillment of these disastrous events, as they rise to a crescendo heralding the Saviour's return, or would you rather have balcony seats and watch it from above, if you know what I mean?

Perhaps I'm presuming too much, but I think most of us would prefer to watch the fulfillment of these cataclysmic events from the family friendly section, rather than on the front lines of the action. It's one thing to watch a disaster movie, it's another matter to be part of the script. I think all of us have a deep respect and sympathy for Christians in places like China and Indonesia, who suffer severe persecution for their faith, but most of us are thankful we don't have to experience the same trials and go through similar tribulation. The world speaks of these things in dark terms such as the end of the world and doomsday. We live in the world and so it's not surprising that Christians often adopt the same attitude of fear and use the same negative terms to describe these events. What's interesting is that Jesus speaks of them in positively glowing terms, saying *"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

Let me ask you another question. If you were being held prisoner in a death camp like those run by the Nazis in World War II, or by the Communists in the Soviet Union during the cold war or China now, would you be afraid or hopeful, if an army was approaching to liberate you? If the ground shook with bombs and the sky was lit up with missiles, because your liberator was drawing near, would you be fearful or expectant? Would you feel sad or glad? From God's perspective this world is a prison in which believers are held captive; in bondage to sin, persecuted by the

world, tempted and accused by the devil and under the condemnation of death. The coming of Jesus is our liberation from prison, the end of sorrow, sighing and dying and the beginning of what Paul calls, *"the glorious freedom of the children of God."* When you think of it like that your whole perspective on death and the end of the world changes. No wonder Jesus says, *"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

The week before He went to the cross, Jesus spoke in general about the things that would come upon the world before His return and in great detail about the things that would come upon Jerusalem within 40 years, or one generation after His departure. He prophesied the Jewish rebellion against Rome, which happened in 70 AD and resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, the desolation of the temple and the deaths of thousands of people. When He encountered the women of Jerusalem weeping for Him as He made His way to the cross, He told them, *"Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children."* He knew a time would come when the Romans would besiege the city, starve it into submission and commence a slaughter that would make them wish they never had children to see them die so cruelly. The believers in Jerusalem remembered His words, took them to heart, fled the city and were spared. Jesus' prophesy of what would happen to Jerusalem showed Him a true prophet and verified again that He indeed has the words of eternal life and we do well to listen to Him.

What happened to Jerusalem is a small scale of what will happen on a greater scale to the whole world, throughout time piece by piece and universally, immediately before Jesus' return. In the eyes of the world it will seem like things are rapidly spinning out of control. It has been this way throughout time, but it will increase as the time draws near for the renewal of all things. Consider the madness that overwhelmed the world a century ago at the start of what people called the Great War. A century ago, the world was spinning out of control as nation took up sword against nation, in a conflict that was unrivaled in its extent and brutality. Then there was the world-wide influenza. People couldn't imagine things getting any worse. But they did, and matters were immeasurably worse when the sequel to World War I came in 1939.

It's odd, but some people blamed God for the First and Second World Wars, as if He was the cause. The cause of these things of which Jesus spoke in particular about Jerusalem and in general about the world so long ago, is not God, but human

beings. Nevertheless, God is in control, in the sense that He can and does work all things for the progress of the gospel that more might believe; and for the eternal salvation of those who do believe. The world thinks things are spinning out of control, the devil thinks he is in control, but believers know God is in control; working in all things to bring our redemption to fulfillment at the return of Christ. These things remind us of Jesus' promise to return and assure us again of the certainty of His word and of its power to accomplish salvation in our lives.

Even though the world doesn't believe Jesus' words, it has a sense of fear and foreboding that the things Jesus said might be true. On April 26, 1986 a catastrophic accident occurred at the nuclear reactor in Chernobyl, Ukraine. A cloud of radioactive material spread through the atmosphere, circled the earth and caused great degradation to the environment. Earth, air and water were polluted. People scrambled to take precautions and protect themselves from radioactive material in the environment. All of which was to be expected. But perhaps the oddest reaction was that many committed communists in the Soviet Union began reading the bible, fearful that they had inadvertently fulfilled a prophecy. Revelation 8:10 says, *"The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood."* Chernobyl in the Cyrillic bible. The world calls natural calamities acts of God, as if God hates the world. But God loves the world. God loves the world so much He gave Jesus to be its Saviour. Through these things that happen either naturally or by human action, God calls the world to see its need for His salvation, see Jesus and receive Him as its Saviour.

In our text Jesus says that the things that will befall the world will also befall Christians living in the world. This will happen, not because God doesn't love His Christians. If God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us when we were separated from Him through sin, hostile to Him in action and attitude, how much more does He love us now that we have been reconciled to Him through the blood of the cross and become His children through faith in Jesus and baptism into His death and resurrection? God has allowed these things to happen to believers throughout history and permits it even now, so that as His children, His ambassadors to this world, we Christians may give testimony to our faith and bear witness to the love and salvation God offers to all people through Jesus Christ.

Jesus says, *"There will be terrors and great signs from heaven...They will lay their hands on you and persecute you...This will be your opportunity to bear witness."*

God doesn't spare us from the things that befall the world, or from persecution. The things that believers have suffered throughout history have been an opportunity for them to bear witness to the Saviour's love. Through these things which we would prefer to avoid, the church has grown in faith and the number of believers has grown throughout time. The church continues to grow in time as believers in China, Indonesia and throughout the world, bear witness to Jesus in the midst of persecution, suffering and natural disaster. The world thinks suffering is a sign of weakness and disaster a sign of defeat. Believers know that Christ's power is displayed most fully in our weakness. The devil thinks he can kill the church through persecution. Believers know that in persecution, we sense most keenly the closeness of Christ and that through our witness in suffering and calamity, the Holy Spirit proclaims the gospel of God's love for the world and brings many more to faith.

The signs of the coming kingdom are fearful to the world and even to believers. After all who wants to be caught in an earthquake, swept away in a tsunami, be stricken with an illness, be arrested or persecuted for our faith? It's one thing to see special effects in a movie, or hear about the persecution of fellow believers, but who wants to suffer the experience of those things? In the Garden of Gethsemane as He contemplated the cross and considered the awful price He would pay for our salvation, Jesus prayed, *"Father if it is possible let this cup pass from me. Yet, not what I will, but thy will be done."* We pray God to spare us from these things as much as is possible, but we know that in our lives as Christians and as Christians living in the world, some measure of suffering and persecution will come. But we remember that when they come, these are not signs of God's absence, His anger or Christ's lack of concern for our lives. These are signs that the Kingdom of God draws near. In the remembrance of that promise, we receive endurance from the Holy Spirit and the peace of knowing that something better, more beautiful and more wonderful than we can imagine is hastening towards us. In all these things we lift up our heads because we know that our redemption is drawing near.

The redemption that draws near will be worth the wait, worth all the suffering and patient endurance that is required of the saints in time past and in the time to come. The redemption that draws near will be our release from the prison of this world, in which every joy is accompanied by a shadow and foreboding of sorrow; where our lives are always infected with the virus of sin and in which every life ends in death. Jesus' return will be our liberation to life as God intended it to be; sin,

sorrow and sighing will be forever gone. Death, the devil and every evil in the world, along with every evil of body and spirit, will be forever gone. There will be joy and gladness, such as the world never experienced and no mind could conceive. We will see God, feel the touch of His hand wiping the tears from our eyes and their memory from our minds. We will hear the voice of Jesus say, *"Behold, I am making all things new."* This is the redemption Jesus calls us to look forward to, the redemption to which our faith presses, the redemption to which time hastens. *"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* God in His mercy bless us with His grace and preserve our faith until the coming of Jesus and the life everlasting. In Jesus' Name. Amen