

Luke 21:25-36

Have you ever noticed how much of the creed speaks of the future? Each week we remind each other that Christian people are looking forward. Why? We remind ourselves that our Saviour is in control of the future as well as the present and the past.

So we say:

“ . . . He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead

And his kingdom shall have no end.” So we tell each other about the Lord Jesus.

And we also speak of:

. . . the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.”

We are the people with the best future imaginable.

Our gospel for today is among Jesus' last words to his disciples before his betrayal, trial and death.

He is preparing them for that to happen.

They are to grasp the marvellous truth that he will not desert them. No! He will continue to be with them and guide them by the Holy Spirit as to what they are to say.

And more than that. It's clear that the Jesus who is shortly to be put to death is undoubtedly the ruler of world history. Although his disciples at this point just don't understand that, after he has died and been raised to life again it's as clear as crystal.

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So they are to stand firm, as he says in Luke 21:19: *"Stand firm, and you will obtain life"*

And in our passage for today, there is another stand-ing he teaches us to engage in:

It is not just to stand firm, but to stand up. In other words, to take courage. Don't fear the future now matter how bleak, but as he says in Luke 21 verse 28, embrace it!

"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Or as he says in verse 36 *"Be always on watch, and pray you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."* (Which is of course his name for himself).

What does he mean?

Jesus firstly gets his disciples to look forward to a local catastrophic event which will bring the end to their and his beloved city of Jerusalem – and then gets them and us to look to the end of history itself.

In verses 20 to 24 he speaks about the destruction of Jerusalem.

We know that happened at the hands of the Roman tyrants in AD 70. We know it was terrible, just as Jesus said it would be. Sadly it was the judgement of God against the nation of Israel for their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah.

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But it was also the sign that God had moved on. Jerusalem – and specially its glorious temple – had been a symbol or shadow of God being with his people. No, the time had come when he would have people from all nations, not just Jews, as his people. And the reality that the temple foreshadowed – God living in and with his people – is now in a person – the Person of God’s Son, our Lord Jesus.

It was now what Jesus calls “the times of the Gentiles.” That is, the time when the gospel offer goes not only to the Jews, but out to the nations, the non-Jews, the Gentiles.

But he gets them to look even beyond that time to the end of all things.

So from the End of the Temple he draws us to the End of all things:

“There will be,” he says, ...

“25... signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

Mindblowing? It’s meant to be! What will it be like? The point is this: As Jesus was correct about the destruction of Jerusalem, we must trust him over this ultimate prediction. He was right when he said (verse 32): “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things [referring to the destruction of Jerusalem] have happened.”

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We must, therefore, trust him when he says (verse 33), *“Heaven and earth will pass away [referring to his Second Coming], but my words will never pass away.”*

Did you notice how his disciples are to react? His disciples then, and his disciples now?

In verse 34: *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day [for us, Christ’ return] will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

He knew it was so easy to lose sight of eternity and of the fact that “that day” is coming. If you don’t look out, says Jesus, it “will close on you like a trap”.

But positively, listen to verse 28:

When things all around are hard, *“stand up and lift up your heads.”* And why? Answer: *“Because your redemption is drawing near.”*

And in verse 36: *“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”*

Isn’t that remarkable? I mean, in the midst of confusion, of famine, war, error, cruelty, persecution, natural disasters Jesus says: “stand up!” NOT: “Fall down - in fear!”

But like a child eagerly welcoming a loving parent home knowing they will be swept up into the arms of love – so with us.

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Like a servant at the sound of his master's key in the door standing up out of respectful love – so with us.

When we remind each other of the future, when we draw to the end of the creed each week – it's supposed to be a time of great joy and expectancy!

Others will only look forward to the end of history as the time of judgement and will fear their sin being exposed before God. Unless they repent now, they will tremble in the face of his just sentence upon them.

But we – it's remarkable – we are told we will stand in the presence of the Son of Man. In the presence of our loving older brother. We will stand in the presence of God on that last day, in the presence of our lovingly respected heavenly Father. Welcoming that time when we will see him face to face.

And not because we have deserved it, but because we have been embraced by the Saviour in whose hands are all things.