

*UNEDITED DRAFT*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have begun the season of Advent. For the next four weeks, we prepare for the coming of Christ. Yes, we are preparing to celebrate his birth in Bethlehem. But honestly, we don't need much preparation to celebrate a past event. So our focus will be a bit more on preparing our hearts for his second coming of Jesus in glory and judgment.

Now, over the manger certainly loomed the shadow of the cross. It was the purpose for his first coming for by the cross he ultimately paid our sin debt and restored our relationship with God. But over the manger there was not only the shadow of the cross, but the shadow of a crown. The story of Jesus didn't end at the cross. There was also an empty tomb. 40 days later he ascended into heaven. And the story is still not over. Jesus will come again soon and this world as we know it will come to an end, he will return in glory, he will bring all of his own to dwell in his eternal presence forever. As we prepare to meet Jesus in a manger, we also keep our eyes on the shadow of the crown that will soon come. The one who came in humility will come again in glory.

Today, our God teaches us how important it is for us as Christians to always have the long view. We need to keep our eyes focused way down the road. And the long view is this: Jesus is coming again soon. This world will pass away. Our eternal future will be with God living with him in eternal paradise. But we have an extraordinarily hard time keeping that long view. Aside from occasional reminders on Sundays, we tend to live our daily lives thinking about the here and now. In the middle of the daily grind, the long view includes future career options and retirement planning. But that's still short term and nearsighted in view of the eternity that is to come.

So today we will listen to Jesus words in Luke 21:25-36 where Jesus teaches us to stop looking down and in front, but to look up and distant. Jesus is coming!

**Luke 21:25-36 “There will be 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. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.**

The timing of these events isn't clear. I think it's best to think of these things as signs that Jesus' return is upon us. So these things happen and then moments later Jesus is there? Or these things begin to happen, and it will be days? Weeks? Months? A decade? We don't know exactly. Are the signs in the heavens are increasing knowledge of them? Or something sudden and drastic? Is the roaring and tossing of the ocean what is happening now with global sea levels rising? Or something more dramatic? Maybe it's a both / and. The end is drawing nearer!

It is getting closer and closer until we see the final sign: the Son of Man himself will be visible arriving in a cloud with power and great glory. That last sign is unmistakable. You will see him with your own eyes!

And what should you do when you see these signs?

**When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”**

Note that Jesus doesn't say, "Cower! Be afraid! Crawl under a rock somewhere!" He says "Stand up, lift up your heads. Something fantastic is about to happen. Your redemption." Everything God has promised you in Christ Jesus is going to take place.

**He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.**

Jesus uses an illustration commonly known to his listeners. When leaves sprout, you know summer is near. They are a sign of what is coming soon. Signs on the road serve the same purpose. They tell us how soon something is coming. The anticipation rises as the signs indicate your destination is getting closer and closer. If you've ever driven across the state of Nebraska, you know how long that drive is, and how little there is to look at. It seems like the fields will keep going forever. If you're driving back home, you keep watching for the Omaha signs. What keeps you going is that the number keeps getting lower. Those signs remind you that you're getting there. So also the signs of the end. They remind us that we're getting there! Don't give up hope. Don't lose your focus. Jesus continues.

**"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**

Entire empires rise and fall. Everything that seems so permanent to us in this world really isn't. Change, decay, loss, theft... nothing is permanent in this world. Except for the one thing that comes from out of this world: the words of Jesus. His promises and truth never change. They last for eternity!

**"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 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."**

In this section, Jesus gives us a warning of what is to come. This earth *will* pass away. It's not going to last forever. So Jesus warns us to be on our guard for things that lead us to drop anchor in this world. Things that attach you to this world. He says "Be careful of dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life." Dissipation is a word that means the very bad things people do when you're drunk. Drunken behavior without moral restraint." To which some people might say, "Well, I don't do stuff like that when I'm drunk" to which Jesus responds... "don't be weighed down by drunkenness either." Either way it's bad. Drunkenness makes a person very shortsighted. A person in a drunken stupor is not giving any thought to the future, and is only living in the moment. That's already a problem. But an added problem is that they're likely to do stupid and immoral things as well. It weighs down a person. It pulls a person's gaze from heavenly, eternal realities and puts their focus on the here and now.

And he lists one other thing that tends to do that: "the anxieties of life." In everyday life we have problems and face issues that pull our attention to now, and draw our attention from "then." Bad things will happen in life. They can't be stopped. Some go through periods of little anxiety, but sooner or later, something comes up. An unexpected expense, a health issue, a loved

one that's suffering in some way, a car accident... life happens. And when it does, our gaze is pulled down to earth. We are weighed down and burdened and distracted.

But Jesus warns us that the day is coming unexpectedly. Are you ready? Have you become distracted? When Jesus comes on that day, will you stand, or will you be swept away in his judgment?

God does reveal to us how we can be absolutely confident on that day. He tells us how we can without question STAND. The ability to stand before him guiltless on that day does not come from you. The only way to stand before him guiltless is if he does something to make that happen. Only if he somehow could remove your guilt. And that's what God does through Jesus. Yes, that same Jesus who is coming in power and glory with the clouds to judge all people... that Jesus came a first time 2000 years ago in complete humility when he was born a baby in Bethlehem. He came as your substitute and Savior. He lived for you perfectly. He died for all your sins. In Christ, you are not guilty. In Christ that day holds no terror. God has made you to be exactly what he requires you to be. In Christ, on that day you will stand.

Now, while we wait for Jesus to return, we need to stop looking down right in front of ourselves. We need to stop looking around. Instead, look up. Look up and with the spiritual eyes of faith, see Jesus your Savior coming.

This world will not last. This world is passing away. It's a waste of time and energy pursue what doesn't last.

### **Conclusion:**

When someone is just learning how to drive, their whole focus is very close. They are focusing on the inside of the car... where the peddles are, where the turn signal is, where the speedometer is. And even outside the car, their focus tends to be near. They tend to keep their eyes on the road immediately in front of the car rather than keeping their eyes focused on the whole road ahead. The result is twofold. 1) They tend to make quick and frequent corrections. The car drifts toward one side of the lane so they quickly correct. The quick correction makes the car go toward the other side of the lane. Their attention is taken up by the road immediately in front, just trying to keep the car going straight. But the thing is, because they focus on the road immediately in front, they don't even do a good job at that... the car moves around quite a bit within the lane. Then the second consequence is 2) because so much focus and attention and energy go into the inside of the car and the road immediately in front of the car, they are very poorly prepared to handle whatever is coming just a little further up the road. They don't see the stopped traffic ahead. They don't see the tire shred coming up in their lane. They don't anticipate exiting the highway as the exit is all of a sudden there. When those things come along, and they always do, it causes panic, anxiety, and overreaction, white-knuckling grasp on the steering wheel. So the irony is that by focusing on the road immediately ahead, they drive more poorly all around... and even makes them poorer drivers for what is immediately in front of them. Even the immediate tracking in your lane gets straight as you keep your eyes focused down the road with the long view. Obstacles in the road are met with calmness. Slowed traffic is anticipated and you gently break. With the long view, driving can be very relaxed.

In a similar way, as we go down the road of life, we tend to focus on the instruments around us – like money and possessions, and we tend to focus on the road right in front of us. We fail to see the whole view of the road ahead. We often forget where it is we are going... what our final destination is. Focusing on what's immediately in front of you, the challenges of life will cause great tension... job loss, moving, health issues, loved one dying, unexpected expenses,

large debts... all of these things cause great tension, anxiety and white-knuckling it through life. But with the long view and the knowledge of God's promise that you will reach your eternal destination just fine, and, in fact, he will be with you every second of that journey, you can calmly deal with the obstructions and hazards on the road of life.

ASSIGNMENT: This week watch for the signs Jesus listed. Watch for the evidence that you live in a sinful and broken world. And when you see the signs, look up. Literally... stop for just a moment and look up. You hear of another terrorist attack. Look up. You lose your job – look up. You hear of a break in your neighborhood – look up. The doctor has bad news for you – look up. You hear about another hurricane, tornado, wildfire, plane crash... look up. Look far off into the sky, out a window, off into the distance. Remind yourself of the big picture, the long view. Jesus is coming soon. The one who died for you, redeemed you, and washed you clean is coming back for you to rescue you out of this world and its suffering and pain and brokenness. It will all be a distant memory.

Be ready! Don't be weighed down with our eyes cast in front of you. You could easily go right off the road. Keep your eyes focused on Jesus. When life happens, look up! Stay calm. Rejoice! Whatever happens, it hasn't changed your course in the slightest. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He is coming soon. Amen