

December 1, 2024

Pastor Prieue

First Sunday of Advent

Luke 21:25-36 NIV 11

²⁵“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. ²⁶People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³²“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be 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.”

Prepared to Stand without Fear before the Son

1. Repenting Wholeheartedly
2. Trusting Completely
3. Living Carefully

Dear children of God, who are eagerly preparing to celebrate Christ’s First Coming, and just as eagerly awaiting his Second Coming.

There’s a feeling I remember well, and it’s not the kind of feeling you like to be able to remember well, but it’s the kind that sticks with you. At this point, it was almost 20 years ago, but remembering it can still bring back the “sick to my stomach, hairs on my neck standing up feeling.” I had broken a lamp, and not just any lamp. It was the fluorescent guitar lamp that I had gotten from my parents for Christmas, not long before. And the way it broke could hardly be considered “accidental”. My buddy Joey and I were playing nerf football in the house and one got away. We stood over its lifeless lamp body, thinking through our options. Since it wasn’t totally shattered, only the glass on the top was broken off, we considered whether we might be able to stand it back up on the piano without anyone noticing. But we concluded that the fact that the gas was gone out of the bulb and the light didn’t actually turn on anymore would be a dead giveaway. I sent Joey home and I sat and waited for what was to come—for Dad to come home.

That dreadful feeling of waiting fearfully for what is to come is a feeling I can still re-experience as I remember it, and it’s no way to live. In our text for today, Jesus shows us that it’s not how he wants us to live. And so, as he talks about the things that are to come at the end of the world, he gives us words to prepare us, who believe in him, to stand without fear before him. That’s our goal and theme today, to be—***Prepared to Stand without Fear before the Son.***

Let's start with addressing fear itself. That feeling of fear I described is certainly not unwarranted. It's the appropriate recognition that we have committed sin, and sin brings with it a due punishment from God. God has actually placed that fear into the hearts of all mankind in what's called their natural knowledge of God. It's the sense we get from our conscience that there is a problem with our relationship with God, and we are going to have to answer for what we have done, and that notion fills us with guilt and fear, or at least it should if it's just us as guilty sinners before a holy God. We hear in Romans 2 how **"every mouth will be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."** (Romans 2:19).

That sense of guilt is what drives the fear of what is to come that Jesus says will set in on the world when the signs of the Last Day start happening. **"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. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."** (Luke 21:26). It's natural to be afraid of judgment. Apprehensive terror and fainting will come from the recognition that the day of Judgment has come and it's too late for anything else. The time is up. **"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."** (Luke 21:27).

This is the day you can't afford to be on the wrong side of, because the judgment made on that Great Day will be permanent and result in everlasting life or death. And there is nothing holding back that day from coming right now. Jesus says it will come like a thief in the night. So as you think about the possibility that all this could happen in the next instant, what are the sins that immediately trouble your mind and heart, that fill you with fear because they have gone unaddressed and unrepented of, sins that have become your secret pet, sins that have become willful or habitual, or are threatening to master you. Jesus warns specifically about carousing, excessive partying and drunkenness and getting distracted with the anxieties of life. Now is the time to confess them to God and one another, to disown and detest every evil thing our hearts have held onto before the trap springs and closes on us. Jesus' warning here calls us 1) **to repent wholeheartedly** in preparation for the day,

The book of Revelation describes what will happen among those who have loved and cherished wickedness and lived persistently in their sin, the unbelievers of the world. **"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"** (Revelation 6:15-17).

That's what Jesus and the Bible says about the reaction of unbelievers, but what does he say to his disciples, to believers, and to you? In total contrast to unbelievers bent to the ground in fear, hiding in caves, hoping the mountains will fall on them and hide them from God, Jesus gives this command to his own. **"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."** (Luke 21:28). We said before that the fear of judgment is natural, but this is unnatural. Being able to stand up and lift up your heads with confidence on the great Day of Judgment means that some kind of incredible preparation has taken place leading up to that moment.

That preparation, dear friends, is what Jesus came to this earth to accomplish for us and in us during his *first coming*, so that we would be ready and able to stand at his *second coming*. This is the real preparation that Christmas prompts, more than putting up lights and trees and baking cookies and buying presents. In preparation for a real Christmas, we ready ourselves to receive once again the child God promised to bring righteousness and deliverance, to destroy the devil's work and free us from fear. Listen to the way the writer to the Hebrews explains it. **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** (Hebrews 2:14,15).

Let's boil that down a bit. Jesus took on our human flesh to break the devil's power and free us from the fear of death. The main reason people are afraid of death is because that's when judgement happens for all those who die before Judgment day. Jesus came at Christmas to free us from the fear of death and judgment, to make us prepared to stand before him on the Last Day, without fear!

But what is it that he does to make that happen, to free us and make us prepared? Before we finish that thought, I never told you what happened when my Dad got home. He wasn't two steps through the door when I did the best thing I coulda done. I blurted out, “Dad, you know that guitar lamp you and mom got me for Christmas? I broke it. Joey and I were playing football in the living room, and we it knocked over. I'm sorry.” He looked at it and could tell as well as I could it that it was a goner, there was no taping the glass light bulb back together. I don't remember what he said, but I remember what he did. The next day he went to the store, and he bought a new one, this one, and he put the new one into the broken one's place. He paid the price of forgiveness, he made the exchange, and he never told my mom, which was nice.

Isn't that what our Father in heaven does? Take the cost of that Christmas exchange times a hundred billion trillion, and we might be getting somewhere near the cost of the exchange God our Father in heaven made, the cost of redemption, the precious blood of Christ. He saw children who were lost and broken, and he sent his own Son, someone new and perfect to stand in our place. It's what Jeremiah foretold in our first lesson, **“I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land...This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”** (Jeremiah 33:14,15)

We can stand without fear because of the exchange that has taken place. **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** 2 Corinthians 5:21. He becomes our sin, and pays the price for it; we become righteous! For every sin that should fill us with guilt and fear, we have this comfort and confidence instead. **“If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”** (1 John 2:1). If he's the one who took our place when he came to this earth, and right now he serves as our advocate in heaven, we don't have to worry about standing before him on the day he comes us judge. He has already made our peace for us. He's taken away our fear of that day. Now we get to be like my little 14-month-old boy Teddy, who is just as happy as can be to see Daddy when he comes home from work. He smiles and runs to greet me!

That's how we can lift up heads with confidence. **2) Trusting completely** in Jesus being our righteousness, we are prepared to stand before him on the day he returns. Faith in Jesus Christ enables you dear believer, not just to not fear or fret Judgment day, but to long for it's reappearing. As the writer to the Hebrews also says, **"Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are *waiting* for him."** (Hebrews 9:27-28). His first coming has prepared you stand without fear at his second coming!

Now as we wait, we long for his reappearing. And the exchange he made for us from broken to new, from guilt to innocence, and from fear to confidence, is really something quite dramatic. It even changes our desires and our living now during the wait. 20 years later this guitar lamp is still intact, not because our throws got more accurate, but because we didn't play football in the living room anymore. The new lamp meant something. It was grace and forgiveness, and it changed our actions from then on.

Jesus becoming our righteousness has a much bigger effect on us than a new 25 dollar lamp. Jesus has given us grace and promised us heaven, and we don't want to fall back into our old ways. It makes us want **3) to live carefully**, just like Jesus says, **"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap..."** (Luke 21:34).

Thinking back a week or two to a few days of deer hunting helped me to understand this pretty easily. The later you stay up enjoying in moderation a few cold ones in the hunting shack with your dad and uncles corresponds directly to how hard it is to wake up and get out there before dawn and how heavy your eyelids are as you try to watch carefully for deer throughout the day. Now I suppose it's not a sin to be asleep in your deer stand while the deer are passing by, but I think you get the point. We want to live carefully and watchfully so that our actions and distractions and sins of this world like drunkenness don't lull our faith to sleep for when the day of Judgment springs like a trap and we're not ready for it. Jesus says, **"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."** (Luke 21:26). My prayer this advent season for you and me alike is that these words of Jesus would drive our hearts to repentance, increase our trust in him and inspire our careful living. It's what Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, **"Now may he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."** (1 Thess. 3:9-13) Amen.