

28 November - 4 December 2021 Luke 21: 25-36

Heads up

Read the passage from Luke. It is written below.

‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’

Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.’

‘Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.’

Bible notes

Luke’s so-called ‘little apocalypse’ is a startling passage. There are sobering warnings of distressing times to come. In very recent history, there has been a real sense that the powers of the earth, if not the heavens, have been shaken. It is possible to be overwhelmed by the text and recent world events but, in the light of both, Jesus in his speaking and Luke in his editing offer signs of hope to look for, and ways of alert, hopeful living to be strong in.

In verse 28, there is the call to ‘stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is near’. These are confident, hopeful actions. In verse 31, there is the hopeful assurance that ‘the kingdom of God is near’. And in verse 33, we have the confidence-giving statement that Jesus’ ‘words will not pass away’. Throughout the passage there is an undergirding sense of the faithfulness of God fulfilling God’s purposes and not being thrown off course by tumultuous events. Alongside this is a concomitant call to faithfulness on the part of God’s people.

In verse 27, we have the most exalted image of Jesus in Luke's Gospel: the picture of 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory' (Joel B Green, *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1997 ISBN 978-0-8028-2315-1). It is interesting that the church's liturgical year ends with a celebration of Christ the King and the next year begins with this portrayal of Jesus. Joel Green in his commentary suggests that Luke has included this material in his Gospel because 'his audience has not been living in expectation of the Parousia'. (Parousia, literally 'arrival', refers to the second coming of Christ.) Maybe we too can lose sight of or appreciation of the glory of Jesus – something that Advent gives us the opportunity to rediscover, in both the wonder of the glorious one who is to come and the sign of the vulnerable baby of Bethlehem.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

Two friends were walking across a barren concrete wasteland. One commented on a single blade of grass pushing through a tiny crack. Years later, they returned to the site and found the sea of concrete now covered in a carpet of grass. What small signs or shoots of hope can we see in desolate scenes today? What would it take to nurture them and help them to grow? What has God placed within the natural world that we can partner with to bring forth good and hopeful things? And how might prayer that is alert to such things contribute to this?

Reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



Questions

- The artist writes: 'It takes a lot of courage to show yourself, to open your own cage, and let your soul be free!' – how is this a hopeful image?
- What small things in your life bring you hope?
- What does hope look like in your community?

Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

A prayer of adoration

Eternal God, hope of the world,
we cannot grasp the immensity of your being,
and yet all around us we catch glimpses of your power.
You speak to us in nature's blessings.
You speak to us through science and creativity.
You reveal yourself in the love and the care
and the support of those around us.
You show yourself when we most need to see you.
When we least expect it, we see your hand at work.
We read your Word, time and time again,
and suddenly, we are amazed by seeing something new.
Eternal God, we adore you.
Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Loving God,
as we end our time together and leave this place,
let us go in hope, live by hope,
and be signs of hope for all to see.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.