

Don't Give Up, Look Up!

11/13/22

SJN

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

God's Word comes to us this morning from our OT lesson where we hear these words once more: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings." (Malachi 4:1-2) This is the Word of the Lord.

"The Day Is Coming." "The Day Is Surely Drawing Near." And what day is that, do you suppose? Thanksgiving? No.... nobody really cares much about Thanksgiving anymore, except for maybe eating turkey and watching football and getting a head start on . . . Black Friday... you know that really big shopping day of the season - - that day that lots of people get all excited about... even getting up at the crack of dawn in order to get to the front of the line at the store. But no... that's not the day I'm talking about.

Oh, OK then, Pastor Ron you must be talking about Christmas. Only 41 shopping days left till Christmas! Christmas songs are already playing on the radio and in the stores... Hallmark has all sorts of Christmas movies lined up and playing. But no... that's not it, either. That's not the big day to which I refer.

"The Day Is Coming."... The Day... of the Lord. The Last Day. The Day of Christ's Return. The Second Coming... Judgment Day. That, beloved... is the Big Day that is still to come. And... it is coming... it is coming at any time. It could come very soon... so soon, in fact that you may even miss out on all those Black Friday shopping deals. Oh, well.

The Day of the Lord - the Second Coming of Christ - is a lot bigger deal than anticipating the release of the latest version of iPhone, Smartwatch or whatever the latest electronic gizmo is. There is an end goal in sight for this world, and yet... most of the people in this world are walking around not paying any heed to what is to come. They're walking around like the Walking Dead that they are.

But not so with you, friends! You are Christians - baptized believers - and our Lord would have you cognizant and conscious... alert and awake and aware... of what is in store for this old world as we get closer to the Last Day. That's what today's message is all about.... what difference it makes to us, brothers and sisters... that "THE Day... IS Coming."

And so give this coming reality the due attention it deserves... and be ready - be prepared - for it. The Bible is replete with prophecies and passages about the coming day of the Lord... listen to Malachi once more, "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." This describes a day of judgment... the ultimate Day of Judgment... the final judgment. And it will be fearsome and final. The wicked will be trodden underfoot. The Lord will strike the unbelieving world with utter... destruction.

The wrath of God will descend on all sinners. This, friends... should get our attention. If this looming Day of Judgment is on the way... how will we be able to escape? What hope is there for us? Do we have any claim to exempt ourselves from the coming judgment? Absolutely, we do... but it is not in ourselves. Our help is in the name of the Lord. Malachi describes this as well: "But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall." Whew! This sounds a lot better! I'd rather have a sun rising on us with healing... than have a fire setting us ablaze. I'd rather us go leaping like calves from a stall, full of life and vigor... than get trodden underfoot and struck with destruction.

So... how do we get from point A to point B... in other words... from the day of the Lord being a Day of Judgment and destruction... to it being a day of salvation and joy and righteousness? Malachi tells us that as well: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

The Lord will send us Elijah. And you may recall that Elijah was a preacher of repentance. This passage in particular is a prophecy of John the Baptist... that great preacher of repentance who prepared the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. But really, it applies to all of God's preachers who call God's people to repentance. Christ is coming again... and this calls for us to repent and turn to God in humility... turning away from our sins and turning to him for forgiveness.

So how do we prepare for the Day of the Lord? By taking this coming Day of Judgment very seriously... heeding the call to repentance... and at the same time looking forward to this great and awesome day as a day of salvation.

And don't become so obsessed with all this end-time stuff... that you neglect your daily vocation. That was a problem for the Thessalonians, as we read about in our Epistle lesson. The Thessalonians had heard the preaching about the return of Christ, and they did take it to heart. But their problem was that they went a little overboard with it. They figured that if Christ was coming again - and could come any day - then what's the point of carrying on with our daily responsibilities and holding down a job and so forth? Let's all go up on a mountain top and sing songs and wait for Christ to take us home. Sounds like a plan.

But not so fast Paul writes... Not so fast. Jesus is coming again... but it may not be as soon as you're thinking. So carry on with what you were doing. It may be a while. Get back to work. Don't neglect your everyday vocation. There's plenty of work for you to do in case Jesus doesn't come back right away. Keep calm... and carry on.

"As for you, brothers," Paul tells the Thessalonians, "do not grow weary in doing good." Yes, there is a lot of good for us to do before the Lord comes again. He may come tomorrow, or next week, or next year, but then again... maybe not. So let's do what the Lord has given us to do... to carry out whatever vocation and good work we have at hand to do. Husband, wife, father, mother, worker, church member, teacher, citizen, student, whatever - put your hand to the plow and do that work nobly and honestly.

Also... are there people in your life - people you will encounter this week, for whom you can be a blessing - people you can love and serve? There is the good work God has placed in front of you. Recognize those opportunities, and love those people in Christ... and at the point of their need. God will give you the strength to do it. Ask him for help, and he will give it.

The day of the Lord is also the great hope of the church, even in the midst of great affliction... so lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near.

Indeed, this coming day is a day of salvation for all those who trust in Christ. He has made it so... because the judge who is coming is also your Savior. He is the one who died on the cross to pay for your sins and thus take away the judgment. Jesus Christ took the judgment on himself - the wrath of God against sinners... so that the judgment would not fall on you.

Seek your shelter in the shadow of his wings, and you will be safe. Your refuge - your place of safety - is in the mercy of God, under the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross. No harm will befall you there.

Christ died for you... and then he rose for you, too. His resurrection is the basis for your own resurrection and victory over death and the grave. And his return, likewise, will be for you... to rescue you from the final destruction coming on this world and to lead you into the age to come... when there will be a restored creation and a redeemed people of God, at home in righteousness with Christ and all of God's people... forever. This is the church's great hope... the return of Jesus. This is your hope... THE thing that will see you through the hard times.

And yet... there will be hard times... as there are - right now - for many of us, in one form or another. This world is a tough place to be for a Christian and for the church - for anybody, really. Think of the end-time signs that Jesus talks about in our Gospel reading today: religious deception... political upheaval... natural disasters... the persecution of the church... on top of all the aches and pains of getting older and our bodies falling apart... and the broken relationships we experience in families and among friends. This stuff stinks... It hurts... It could cause one to despair and to lose hope.

But to people like you and me... Jesus encourages us today. He says: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." In other words, Jesus is saying, "All this bad stuff that you will experience in this world could weigh you down and cause you to lose hope. But don't give up. Instead... look up. Soon you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds of glory, and that will be a glorious sight, and a glorious day, for all who bear his name."

The day of the Lord is coming. But do not fear. Take courage. Take hope. Your Lord is coming to redeem you... and this is a promise you can hold on to with fullest confidence. Indeed, beloved... the day of the Lord is coming... don't give up... look up! This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.