

Theme: - The coming of the Son of man.

Today I am preaching on Luke's gospel and chapter 21 begins with Jesus in the temple just before the festival of unleavened bread, which is called the Passover. Jesus was watching people putting their money into the treasury. In verse 6 just before our reading and after the disciples had remarked about the beauty of the temple, Jesus said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone is left upon another; all will be thrown down." In verse 20, Jesus, after speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem, now turns his attention to the future of the world, which will be surrounded by armies, who will bring further destruction, before the coming of the Son of Man.

Our reading starts at verse 25 which reads, "There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves." When Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, the disciples asked, "Teacher, so when will these things be? What is the sign that these things are about to happen?" Jesus then talked about wars and earthquakes and famines and plagues and great signs from heaven and persecution; verses 7 to 19. Those were the signs that would point to the destruction of Jerusalem. Now, in verse 25, Jesus talks about the signs that will point to the coming of the Son of Man; cosmic signs involving the sun, moon, and the stars.

I'm a great fan of Professor Brian Cox who speaks about the sun the moon other planets and the stars in a language that even I can understand. I now understand that our galaxy is in perfect balance and harmony and that we on earth are dependent on the relative size and positions of the sun, moon, the other planets, and the stars staying in the same relative positions because they all have a gravitational influence on our earth's position and stability. The size and the relationship of the earth to the sun, moon, stars, and other planets has resulted in the earth being in precisely the right place for our beautiful planet to support the vast array of life here on earth. Our planet is neither too big or too small and gravity is perfect. We are neither too cold nor too hot. If we were closer to the sun the earth would be a scorched desert and if we were too far away the whole earth would be covered in ice, in either event human life as we know it would not exist.

In verses 25 and 26 St Luke writes that the sun moon and stars are causing distress among nations upon earth. This can only mean that either the sun or the moon or both are changing in some way or changing their position relative to us which would undoubtedly cause distress, for the reasons I've mentioned.

Jesus portrays a scene of tremendous change, very much like the one described in St John's book of Revelation. St John wrote in his book of Revelation at chapter 21 starting at verse 1 these words, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God." And in Revelation chapter 21 verse 4 we read, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

The coming of the Son of Man will seem catastrophic, and Jesus implies that it will be catastrophic for unbelievers, but it will usher in the redemption of believers. The surprise here is that the warning signs and the upheaval didn't point to the imminent destruction of all things, but to a new heaven and a new earth and the coming of the Son of Man, and of our redemption. Because verse 28 reads, "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads because your redemption is coming near."

Jesus has just concluded portraying great cosmic turmoil, and now in verses 29 and 30 he speaks a parable about a fig tree, Jesus said, "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." This would be a scene which they would all be familiar with. We have all seen buds on trees and know that it means the coming of summer. So also, when we see these great cosmic signs, we can now be sure "that the Kingdom of God is near." The coming of the kingdom of God is something that we should anticipate with joy rather than fear.

Jesus taught us to pray, "May your Kingdom come." Chapter 11 verse 2. That is a prayer for Jesus to come again so that he might fully establish God's kingdom here on earth that is only a partial reality in our world today. Indeed, if we truly believe in God's forgiveness to those who truly repent then there is clearly nothing to fear at Christ's second coming. The coming of the kingdom will be a time when wrongs will be made right, and God's people will be redeemed from the things that cause them suffering. The coming of the kingdom, however, according to Luke, will be a turbulent time.

Verse 32 reads, Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place." This is a difficult verse because many generations have already passed away and we are still waiting. Scholars have proposed a whole host of possible explanations, but I prefer to look at Matthew chapter 24 verse 36 and Mark chapter 13 verse 32 both of which covers the same event, and which reads, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." And I have no difficulty with that at all.

Verse 33 confirms the cosmic upheaval, when the relationship within our galaxy changes. In the second part of verse 33 Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Two thousand years after Jesus' death, people are still doing mighty works in obedience to Jesus' words. Day after day, the most unlikely people find their lives transformed by his words.

Repressive governments persecute Christians and destroy churches but are unable to stop people from spreading Jesus' words. We could pick any day of the week at random and be confident that more people would hear Jesus' words for the first time on that day than heard Jesus' words during his lifetime. Jesus' words do not pass away, but just keep building momentum! We can be assured that, if the world lasts another two thousand years, there will still be people who will hear Jesus' words for the first time.

St Luke writes, "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that that day does not catch you unexpectedly."

We are to be on our guard so that on the day that Christ returns to earth we are not taken by surprise, and even worse, not ready. St Luke uses the word dissipation which is even worse. In my dictionary it means debauched living, frivolous amusement to which he adds drunkenness, but also Luke adds, "and the worries of this life." Speaking for myself, I'm fairly confident that I spend more time worrying about things of this world than I do about preparing to be ready for Christ's coming. Worry seems such a mild fault by comparison to dissipation and drunkenness, but worrying about life issues is a sign of the lack of faith. Worry probably affects more Christians than dissipation or drunkenness. So often when things go wrong for me the first thing I do is worry, then I try to put things right on my own, usually by doing the wrong thing, and then my problem becomes even worse. It is only then that I turn to God, and when I do I remember the thousands of times that I've done the same thing before and begin to ask myself will I ever learn to trust God and turn to him first instead of last.

We have our best friend with us day and night, he is called 'God the Holy Spirit,' and yet we worry instead of turning to him for help which he will only be too pleased to give us, that is why he was sent to us to help us and to stop us worrying about things.

Finally verse 36 "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." Jesus calls us to stay alert and to pray. Prayer will help us to avoid dissipation, drunkenness, and anxiety. Prayer will keep us open to receive God's blessings and will focus our spiritual energies to do God's will. For those who are in Christ, this is not a gloom and doom text. It is a call to get ready and to stay ready, because our redemption is drawing near. For Christians, these cosmic events will signal the beginning of eternal life where we will see and be able to speak to Jesus as the apostles did 2,000 years ago because we will live together. Revelation chapter 21 verse 3 reads, "See, the home of God is with mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples."

Revd John White.