

## Luke 21:25-36

Signs are **everywhere**. Traffic engineers use them to tell us the **speed** limit, or where various things are **located**, or where there is **road construction** going on. Football officials use signs to tell us when a play has resulted in a **first down**, or to show us why their **penalty flag** was thrown. Fast food restaurants use signs to show us their **menu**, and to remind us to **wash our hands** after using the restroom. There are signs **everywhere**, in fact, even **God** uses signs. About 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah told Israel, *“The Lord will give you a **sign**: the **virgin** will be with **child** and will give birth to a **son**, and will call him **Immanuel**.”* And, when Jesus was born, an angel told the shepherds, *“This will be a **sign** to you. You will find the **baby** wrapped in cloths, and lying in a **manger**.”*

God **always** sends signs before the arrival of a **big event**, so His people will be able to **get ready** for it. The big event mentioned in our text for today is the return of Jesus on the Last Day. On that day **everyone** will appear before the judgment seat of Jesus, and will either be **condemned** to the eternal fires of **hell**, or will be graciously **welcomed** into the eternal joys of **heaven**. Therefore, God has given us **signs** so we can **be prepared** for the arrival of that great day. Our text contains **lots** of signs which Jesus gave to His disciples. The **question** is, what do these signs **mean**? What do they have to say to **us** as we patiently **wait** for Christ’s return? Jesus doesn’t want us to **look out** in **fear** as we see these signs, but rather He wants us to look **up** with **joy**, and **Read The Signs**. The signs tell us that even though our **world** will **pass away**, our **redemption** is quickly drawing **near**.

Jesus told His disciples, *“There will be **signs** in the sun, moon, and stars.”* Signs in the **sky** - eclipses of the sun and moon, comets and asteroids, and strange occurrences in general - these events of the **sky** are **signs** that the Day of the Lord is coming **soon**. Jesus continues, *“On the earth, nations will be an **anguish** and **perplexity** at the **roaring** and **tossing** of the **sea**.”* Signs in the **sea** - hurricanes and cyclones, typhoons and tsunamis, tropical storms and tidal waves - these events of the **sea** are **more signs** that the universe is getting ready to **implode**. And Jesus doesn’t stop with that either. He also said, *“**Men** will faint from **terror**, **apprehensive** of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be **shaken**.”* The **anguish** and **fear** which people experience due to **terrorism**, as well as to the signs in the **heavens**, give us **another** big clue that something **big** is about to happen. We already see glimpses of that fear in many people, as we

hear about **predictions** of the end of the world. The most recent one that I'm aware of was back in 2016, when it was predicted that **biological warfare** would wipe out the entire human race. It **didn't** happen. As the old predictions **fail**, **new** predictions come out on a regular basis, including things like destruction by **asteroids**, world-wide **recession**, unstoppable **terrorism**, and **nuclear** attacks.

But what do the **signs** say - they say that the Last Day **is coming** - but they **don't** specifically say **when** it is coming. Jesus uses phrases like, "*At that time ... when these things begin to take place ... when you see these things happening.*" In other words, we need to **Read The Signs**, and as the signs occur we will know that the end is **near**. Jesus **will return** as the Lord of all, and His return will mark the **end** of the world as we now know it. That's not a **prediction**, that's a **fact**. Four times in the Book of Revelation Jesus Himself tells us, "*I am coming soon.*" And by the way, don't let the 2,000 years that have gone by since Jesus **spoke** those words **confuse** you. God, who lives in **eternity**, isn't affected by **time** the same way **we** are. In his second letter Peter tells us, "*With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.*" With that in mind, we can expect the Last Day to come **at any time**.

That's what Jesus was telling His disciples. "*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*" In reality, we already **have** that redemption. Jesus **bought us back** from the guilt and punishment of our sins, when He shed His blood on the **cross** for us. So through faith in Jesus, we already **have** freedom from the rule of **Satan**, and from the power of **death** and **hell**. But while we are still in **this** life, we aren't able to **fully experience** the **joy** of our redemption, and **that** is the part which is **drawing near**.

In **this** life, we still **suffer**. Satan **persecutes** us - terrorists attack **schools** and **other** public places - we are bombarded with the **sexual immorality** and **vulgarity** that dominates our culture. The Apostle Paul told the Romans, "*We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*" Yes, we **groan** - we **long** for that day when we will finally be set **free** from this world, which is sick with **sin**, **fear**, and **death**. We long for that **heavenly** home, where the **old** order of things has passed away.

And as we **groan**, and **struggle**, and **long** for the day, the LORD in His mercy continues to strengthen our faith, and He gives us **signs** - signs in the **sky**, in the **sea**, and in the **news** - signs that this **new** life in **Jesus** is on the way. As we **Read The Signs** Jesus brings us great **comfort** - announcing that it won't be **long**, and we will be **delivered** from all evil for all **eternity** - experiencing **first-hand** the kingdom of God in **all** its glory.

In order to **underscore** that comforting message, Jesus told His disciples 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**.”* I realize it's still a long way off, but when **springtime** comes, we'll see the trees start to **bud**, and when we **do**, we know that **summer** will soon **follow**. We can **Read The Signs**. In a **similar** way, when we see all the startling events in the **sky** and in the **sea**, and when we notice how nations are in a **panic** for all **kinds** of different reasons, we can **Read Those Signs** too - **signs** that the kingdom of **God** is near.

But even **without** those signs, we have the promise of **Jesus Himself**. *“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have appeared. **Heaven and earth** will pass away, but my words will **never** pass away.”* Jesus wants each of us to **hold on** to His promise in **faith**. So in order to **strengthen** our faith Jesus said, *“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.”* Jesus urges us to **watch** and **pray**, as if **each day** could be the day when He returns - because it **could** be. We are to throw away the works of **darkness**, daily **repent** of our sins, and **rest** in God's forgiving **grace**.

We will be able to put Jesus' words into **practice** as our faith is **strengthened** through the use of God's **Word** and **Sacrament**. Remember that Jesus suffered and **died** for us - to set us free from our sins. Remember that Jesus **lives** for us and wants us to be with Him in heaven. **Read The Signs** that Jesus **has** given, and that He **continues** to give - signs that show us He is our **Redeemer**, and that He will return to **deliver** us from this evil world, and take us to Himself in **heaven**. Amen.