

**Grace, mercy and love are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

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

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

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

<sup>34</sup> “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> 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.” **This is the Gospel of our Lord.**

**Dear Friends,**

Today, as we begin a new church year, our focus is on “hope.” Hope is defined as having an optimistic wish for a certain outcome. Kids might be hoping for enough snow so that there is a snow day. I hope the Packers will make the layoffs but after last Sunday it doesn’t look too good. You might hope for a certain item for Christmas but you can never be certain if you are going to get it.

In scripture “hope” is stronger than just optimism when it is connected to God’s Word. God keeps his promises – they cannot be broken – and so when we talk about the hope that God gives us it is a “sure” hope that he promises.

Today, as we consider the portion of scripture before us we will see that Advent gives the Christian Hope. Advent is a season in which we prepare for Christ’s coming and as we do that we have the sure hope that, **“The Son of Man is Coming Again,”** because **“The signs are There.”** We have hope because, **“Christ assures us that His Word and Promises will not Pass Away,”** and finally in this portion of scripture he connects that hope with, **“Encouragement as we live for Christ.”**

**I.** How many of you are hoping for Judgment Day? The early Christians looked forward to that day and many felt that it would come in their lifetime. We know that we should look forward to Judgment Day too, but often our feeling is, “Not yet Lord. Just let me finish this or experience that.” But Judgment day is coming at some point in the future. Earlier in this chapter Jesus listed signs that the end is near – false prophets, wars, earthquakes, and famines. We have seen some of these general signs already but in the verses before us he gets more specific: **“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. <sup>26</sup> Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”**

Just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, the sun, moon and stars will not follow their normal courses in the sky. Unbelievers will be in anguish and perplexed at what is happening because they won't know why. The seas will roar and toss like have never happened before and the uncertainty for the unbeliever will be overwhelming – they certainly would never connect it to anything in God's Word.

As I think about these signs that Christ is just about here, I am reminded of all the disaster movies out there. People are overwhelmed because the end the world seems imminent but then someone comes up with a solution to save the day. The solution for Judgment Day is here but the unbeliever has rejected the solution and Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming will only bring them disaster. But as we view all these signs of the end times we, God's Children, have hope. That hope comes to us through faith in Jesus. We recognize that these things must happen before Christ comes again. Jesus describes the response of the believer in this way, **“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”**

Just as the unbelieving world is in turmoil and on the edge of being terrified, God's people – you and I – will lift our head in anticipation because we have God's Word and promises. We look forward to the final deliverance from this imperfect world and imperfect life. With the coming of Christ our salvation will be fulfilled as he gathers us to heaven.

Christ is coming again. That is his promise for us and this promise is meant to bring hope and joy to our hearts. Nothing on this earth can compare to what Christ has prepared for us in heaven so lift up your heads in anticipation of our Savior coming and listen to the additional things our Savior has to say to us as he gives us a sure hope to hold onto until his second coming.

**II. “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”** Theologians have often discussed what did Jesus mean when he referred to “this generation.” I think one of the best explanations is that Jesus was talking about the generation of people who reject Christ – they will always be in this world until the end of time. But we have the comforting promise of our Savior that even though this world will be destroyed, God's promises will never change and they will stand true for all eternity. In other words, we can count on God and everything he tells us in his Word. And that is encouraging as we live our lives today.

God's plan of salvation hasn't changed since the beginning of time and it will not change. Thus, God's Word and God's promises give us a sure hope that our sins have been paid for, our salvation is complete and that faith in Jesus, our Savior, will take us home to heaven.

**III.** So what do we do as we wait for Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming and hold onto his promises? First we are told, **“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.”** In other words, don't get so caught up in the turmoil and anxieties of the world that we lose sight of Christ. Satan is still

active and will use whatever means he can to try and separate us from our Savior so we want to be careful by staying in the Word so it will be easier to recognize his attacks on our faith and on the hope that we have.

Next Jesus tells us, **“<sup>36</sup> Be always on the watch and pray.”** In other words, be ready because Christ will come when we least expect it. Don't let apathy set in when it comes to your spiritual lives and pray. Talk to God daily and ask him to give you all that you need so that you will be able to stand before the son of Man and be welcomed into heaven. As you talk to God make sure that you listen to him as he talks to you through his Word – make sure your conversation isn't one sided.

Advent is all about the future. We, as Christians, can be optimistic about the future because our hope and optimism are rooted in the promises of God. Life in between the two comings of Christ is not easy. There is still suffering and strife – even for believers. Yet Christians are able to endure and live joyful and purposeful lives because we have something more than optimism for the future – we have the sure hope found in God's promises given to us through the Word. Christ gives us that sure hope as his gift for us.

So this Advent season, may you find comfort and strength in the sure hope you have through faith in Jesus. May you come and be fed by his Word regularly so that the Holy Spirit can keep this wonderful hope alive in each and every one of us. Amen.