

Lift Up Your Heads, Your Liberation Is Drawing Near

Kenneth Korby

Luke 21:25–36

Invocation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Reading the Signals of the Time

Our Lord Jesus teaches us today how to read the signals of the time, because the signals are themselves very difficult. They are frightening. They are signals of destruction. We discover that it is almost impossible to manage things. Our best brains and our money, our energies and vitalities don't ever seem to get a hold of them.

The signs and signals are very confusing. Men and women failing for fear, the simple fear of safety and security, the fear of unemployment, the fear that the money won't be any good, the fear that we'll look up at the sky, and instead of seeing "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," we shall see ICBMs and MX missiles and long—range bombers blasting us off the earth. How do you read those signals?

Jesus teaches us in the text today how to look for our liberation and redemption. He does not want our hearts weighed down. God knows there's enough to weigh us down. He does not want our heads bowed down in fear, always ducking under our elbows, waiting for the next catastrophe to fall. Rather, the signals are to be read so that, as we sing and as He teaches, "Look up, lift up your heads, because your liberation is nearer now than it was when you first believed."

What Weighs Us Down: Signs in the Heavens

What is it that beats down our heads and weighs down our hearts? Jesus teaches us along with St. Paul.

There are the natural portents and sun and moon and stars, and we are seeing in our age an enormous amount of superstitious management by the signs of the zodiac. "I'm a warrior. I was born under Sagittarius. Bam!" "Well, I'm a Taurus. I act like a bull."

And with these superstitious signs and all the gold and silver that goes with them, we despise God's word and faith. The signs in the sun and moon and stars have managed our life and twist them up. "I can't live with her. She is the Gemini and I am the Sagittarius. How can we live together?"

Distress of Nations

Secondly, there is distress in the nation. The problem of economics in our own country: everybody fights and quarrels, the people we elect to help get us a budget so we can manage our national money. They seem to be playing with us. All they know how to do is reach deeper and shake out more. But it doesn't seem to solve it; unemployment increases.

And what about the political life? The good men and women in politics have an horrendous battle to fight, and many of them think that their office was for lining their own pockets. And about peace and war, disarmament, even among the nations where our best brains are, and where we spend money for arms, enough money that in one year we could do all of the work of all of the Christians for a decade. And still nothing is clear and certain.

Our hearts tremble with fear, with foreboding. We are like Henny Penny. The nut has hit on the head, and we just wait for the next one, when the sky is going to fall in. That's foreboding. What's next? Heads and hearts are thrown into confusion.

Dissipation and Drunkenness

Our Lord speaks of something that is quite familiar to many of us. The dissipation, the reeling brain, and the upset stomach, because we used the wine or the beer or the whiskey for a weapon, not for a delight. We drown something and now we're hung. And the word he uses for too much drinking, for drunkenness, is where the word methadone comes from.

We chemically inoculate ourselves, and if not with alcohol, then with other kinds of chemistry. The world is just too mean and too rough, and we don't quite have what you call it, guts enough, strengths enough. We just can't keep ourselves together to live in it. So we

methadoneize, chemicalize ourselves. That weighs our hearts down. You can't think, love, act, or pray, clearly.

The Cares of This Life

And then we are weighed down by the cares of the life. I know it for you. Some of you may even know it for me.

There are bills to be paid and uncertainties about work. There are those simple facts of health and enough money to have the medicine. And then the enormous care, if you have any love for anybody else who is poor, how are you possibly going to do something for them? So these are the things that weigh down our hearts and lives. God knows them.

False Readings: Fate and Frantic Survival

Now Lord Jesus teaches his people about this. He wants you to read these signs.

Some make the disaster into God. They say, "That's the way the pickle squirts." And so the terrible end is all they worship. They call it fate. Fate is worshiped more deeply by more people than those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then there is the despair, that frantic effort to make terms with the disaster. We are driven. You ever hear that? All of us are trying to get enough security together that when the boom falls, maybe we will survive, maybe we'll slip through. And we say to ourselves, "We are a surviving people."

And we have youth, our youth, that's where the hope is. But you look at the youth: they are indifferent, they're laden with ennui. [unclear] energies? Will they help us?

How Jesus Teaches Us to Read the Signs

So Jesus re—instructs us on how to read the signs of the time. Disaster and fate and the stars are not Lord. They themselves were made by the Word of the Lord, and by the Word of the Lord He will take them away.

Our own durability, vitality, strength, brains, money, they are not God. They will all be taken away. One thing won't. The words of our Lord Jesus.

And so he says to you and to me, dear people, when the signals are everywhere and you'd have to be the village idiot not to see them, he tells us how to reread the signals. When you see these things coming upon the earth, then you are not to duck once more and get under the covers and drink enough under there so that when you come out you can't feel it. "You are to look up, lift up your head. Your liberation is coming close to you." He, the liberator, the redeemer, is coming with the redemption.

You know how to do it in the wintertime. You wait and wait and wait for spring, and then you look out the window and you see a little bud on the branch, and you see a little crocus poking through the snow; your heart is joyful; you know spring is nearby. That's how you learn to read these signs: the kingdom of God is very near you. The signals are everywhere. So when the labor pains begin, the husband and the wife don't say, "Oh, I wonder if we're going to have a baby"; by that time the new birth is underway. These are signals that he is making a new kingdom.

So Jesus' instruction is repeated in the liturgy, week after week. "Lift up your heads," that you may have the strength to escape it, for our Lord Jesus is the way of deliverance. His flesh, his suffering, his death, his resurrection, that is the way to life and escape from that eternal destruction. And His instructions are, then: hang on to that word, that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man with your head lifted up, not full of shame because all you have is a gory mess of your own works, but your head lifted up, your heart clinging to Him, for He has come to you with power and great glory.

The Word That Abides Forever

The Word of God abides forever. Your life will be taken away and so will mine. Your wife and husband will be gone and so will mine. Your children and parents will be gone and so are mine. Your income, your strengths, your nation, your civilization, along with heaven and earth.

He who made them will end them. He who used a word to construct them will with one word terminate them. It is that word which endures forever.

So the Son of Man comes for us. This is Advent. He comes to us. The glory that He brings and will bring is the glory of the weight and the truth of His cross, His redemption, His liberation for us. It is life over death, and those who trust Him will be vindicated, for that suffering love of Christ is able to save those who trust Him.

“Lift Up Your Hearts”: He Comes to Us

And so the call goes out in the liturgy: “Lift up your hearts.” What do you cry out and reply? “We lift them up to the Lord.”

And then we sing of this wondrous God who comes to us. All other gods you must go find. They get lost. This God is the one who comes to find us. And we pray, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” “Hosanna”—please, hurry up and deliver us.

The one who comes, comes now with meekness, humility, and great desire to invite. He clothes himself in bread and wine. He clothes himself in the words of a preacher, because he wants us to be drawn to him, to trust him, so that we are not driven away, or made more confused, or frightened, but that we are called into him, and he comes to feed us with the word of eternal life.

Truly he makes here his Bethlehem. Bethlehem means house of bread. The loaf of bread for eternal life was born in the house of bread that he might feed us.

Dear people, do not spurn him. Do not be so laden down with your preoccupations and your little gods that you bypass his words. Do not cast Him off and turn aside in silence toward Him, lest He turn aside in silence toward you. Come to Him, so that when He comes again at the end of all time we may have strength to stand before the Son of Man.

Say it with me: “Lift up your hearts.” “We [unclear].” The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus for life everlasting.

SOURCE

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