

Luke 21:25-36 (NIV) ²⁵ "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. ²⁶ Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." ²⁹ He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³⁴ "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. ³⁵ For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ 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."

"Stand up and Lift up Your Heads"

Many years ago I had a very vivid dream about the day I would die. I was standing in a dark room looking through a doorway into a lighted room listening as my first girlfriend asked my sister what had become of me. My sister replied, "Randy died in combat on November 3, 1993." The dream occurred several years prior to the actual date, but it stuck with me, left me a little anxious with a sense of foreboding concerning that date. Would I die November 3, 1993?

Well, the date grew nearer in July of 1993 I moved to Richmond, VA. to begin seminary. But, at that time Richmond had the highest per capita murder rate in the US, more than one a day, and it had me wondering that since I wasn't in the military and therefore wouldn't die in combat, would I die in a drive by shooting which was something highly unlikely for the neighbourhood that the school was in. But still, I wondered. Was it safe for me to walk to class that day or go to the store? Should I just stay in and away from the windows or would that just make the apartment collapse? Would I die November 3, 1993?

So, November 3, 1993 finally came. I wish I could say that the day came and went. I woke up that morning and with Klingon-ish/Navaho-ish resolve said to myself, "This would be a good day to die." I went about the morning; a little nervously I walked to class and so also I walked home from class for lunch and to spend the afternoon studying. I prepared a pot of coffee and left it to brew. Returning in a bit to get a cup, I stepped around the corner into the dark kitchen and gasped in horror at a dead coffee maker sitting on my kitchen counter. I did not die November 3, 1993. Mr. Coffee did. Suddenly, several years of underlying anxiety and foreboding left me in awe at God's sense of humour.

Foreboding dates, dates about which we have a sense of impending evil or misfortune; there has never been a time without one. Do you remember Y2K when people built shelters and stockpiled food because they believed that the clocks in our computers couldn't handle the change to 2000 and would crash causing a global crisis? There's also December 21, 2012, the day on which the ancient Mayan calendar comes to the end. People have gotten so bent out of shape over this date being the end that NASA has released a report debunking it.

On the Christian side of things, I remember back in my senior year of university, some bag of errants started spreading a pamphlet around the Evangelical world entitled, *88 Reasons Why Christ Will Return in '88*. They collected verses which they thought indicated that Jesus would return on Rosh Hashanah 1988, the Jewish New Year on which they celebrate Creation and Final Judgment. RH88 came and RH88 went and Jesus didn't return. The next year they released another pamphlet with corrections and a new date. You may not know it but, both the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses began as movements of people believing the world would end on a specific date at the end of the 19th century. The Adventists have forgotten all about it, but you still find some JW's at the Watchtower refiguring the date.

Anxious times, periods of dreadful apprehension, also come and go. I grew up in the Cold War Era with the expectation that a nuclear exchange between the US and the USSR was imminent. That anxiety found its way into the church as well with people preaching and teaching that we were in the end times. In the mid 70's Hal Lindsey wrote *The Late, Great Planet Earth* in which he proposed that the Book of Revelation was beginning to be fulfilled. History has proven him wrong. These days there is a self-proclaimed prophet named Ronald Weinland spouting his book *2008: The Final Witness* in which he says that with the economic crisis that began in 2008 the first trumpet in the Book of Revelation has blown. Therefore, God has stopped warning and has started the demise of the world...and of course, his website says that when all Hell has finally broken loose people will know that Ronald Weinland is a prophet.

Foreboding dates, anxious times, and add to that confusion as to why calamity is happening; our passage in Luke begins with Jesus speaking of such times using images of eclipses, roaring seas, and the shaking of the heavens. These are apocalyptic code phrases. Eclipses represent divine acting and judgment. Roaring seas is chaos among people. The shaking of the heavens is catastrophic change among establishments that people believe will never change like the falling of empires, banking institutions, democracy, etc. We live in such anxious and confusing times or at least that's the way the major news networks portray it. Just in this past week we've heard of a politically motivated massacre in the Philippines. And, how can General Hillier be so adamant that the Afghani police force is not torturing prisoners that Canada Forces have turned over to them? It's Afghanistan. That's the way they do things and have always done things. Moreover, one week we hear the recession is over and the next we hear about enormous job loss. There have been many recent disasters, hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, tidal waves. Gun violence is increasing in Toronto. Iran and North Korea just don't get it

that nuclear weapons are a little more than just toys. What's wrong with Americans that so many think universal healthcare is a bad idea? Humans are catching pig flu. Sarah Palin wrote a book. If that's not a sign that the End is upon us, I don't know what is.

These are anxious times but we could also say these are the days of miracles and wonder. One of the telescopes staring out into space recently returned pictures of galaxies that are 13 billion light years away. That means it took the light from those galaxies 13 billion years to get here and what we see is 13 billion years old. The CERN particle accelerator in Europe appears to have discovered a new sub-atomic particle that exists only at energy levels close to that of the big bang. I could go on with that list but since those discoveries don't usually make the news, I'm afraid you won't know what I'm talking about. So, I will return to anxious times and foreboding dates and Jesus.

Jesus said that when such times as these are upon us that the Son of Man will return with power and great glory. These are days in which we should be looking for Jesus to powerfully act and prove God's love. He says, "stand up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near." The historical reality of our salvation, the actualization of our hope is coming near in such times as these. The kingdom of God is indeed at hand. These are not days for us to get caught up in hopelessness, in trying to find ways of escapism, in letting our hearts get burdened down. Rather, this is the time to pray, to let the phrase "Come, Lord Jesus" be the rhythm to which our hearts beat. So many times I have said that we are the people of hope, the people who act according to hope. Until the day when Jesus physically returns and heaven and earth become one, in this anxious, confusing, foreboding world we are the ones through whom God manifests his wondrous love to give the world hope. In the world of apocalyptic code-speak seeing the Son of Man come in power and great glory means seeing the disciples of Jesus living in his name until the day he returns. I've talked before of being those who live wasteful, loving lives. That's what it takes.

Let me pull a Tom Hamilton and close with a story. In Fayetteville, NC on November 16, just 13 days ago, on a rural road the body of 5 year old Shinaya Davis was found. She had been kidnapped and killed. Her mother who had reported her missing on November 10 has been arrested for human trafficking and child abuse involving prostitution. Another man is charged with her murder, rape, and kidnapping. Put two and two together...her own mother did this!

Sinaya's father and her extended family could not afford the funeral. Basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal living in Cleveland these days heard about the need on the news, was moved to tears, got in touch, and paid for the funeral. In anxious, confusing, foreboding days such as these, we are those whom God has set aside to do on a regular basis what Shaq did on a whim because he was moved with compassion. Praise the Lord! Lord Jesus come! Amen.