



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON – 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LUKE 21:25-36

NOVEMBER 28, 2021

“JESUS OUR PROPHET”

In Exodus chapter 7, God says to Moses *“I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet...you are to say everything I command you...but I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you.”* Well! If ever there was a description of a frustrating job, it would be that of a prophet. Jesus in Matthew 11 said his cousin John the Baptist *“was more than a prophet... no one greater than he ever born of a woman”* yet as he spoke John was in prison. Speaking in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth in Galilee, Jesus concluded he was unwelcomed even, if not especially among his own.

The prophet has a tarnished reputation by and large. They are either dismissed as squeaky wheels or shrill maniacs intent on shaming if not scaring people out of their wits. Yet prophesy has been part of the Jewish and Christian religions from their infancy. Israel as a people pre-existed Moses by over 400 years, but Moses was the one whom God appointed to make of them a nation, and God gifted Moses and the people with a prophet –Moses’ brother Aaron. When he was about to die, and Israel about to inhabit the land promised them, a place teeming with goodness but also many false religions, Moses told the people God would *“raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers...you must listen to him.”* Absent someone speaking on behalf of God, the enticements of the new land would compete for their devotion.

The New Testament book of Hebrews begins by saying *“in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets, at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”* We think of Jesus then as God’s “final word” or final spokesperson. Hebrews concludes that Jesus now speaks for God. In some sense the church has its prophets still – I speak on Jesus behalf under the call of the church. Martin Luther, while not diminishing the truth that Jesus is our true prophet, priest, and king nor the importance of the office of pastor, nevertheless insisted that parents were every bit “prophets and priests” - appointed to speak to their children “on God’s behalf” – and they do precisely that whenever they teach and talk about faith with them.

Turning then to our lesson today from Luke we see that it bears all the hallmarks of prophetic language – warnings of dire times, critiques of human weakness and sinfulness, the invocation of authority by the speaker (*heaven and earth will pass away but not my words*), and, though a bit harder to detect, the promise that those who hear those words will find blessing – in this case stated as *“be able to stand before the Son of Man.”*

English theologian N.T. Wright suggests the first part of this passage is best interpreted as Jesus prediction of his death, burial, and resurrection. Wright reads *“they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”* as a reference to our Lord’s ascension into heaven rather than his second coming. He thinks these words present heaven’s view of things, not earth’s. That way we can understand how it is our Lord could say *“this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened”*, because, obviously, it didn’t – Jesus hearers all saw these things take place.

The shaking of the heavens and the convulsing of the earth Wright believes to be metaphors for God doing something earth shaking on Calvary – reconciling the world to himself. God’s completed work on earth thus paves the way for His Son’s ascension to heaven – this is his vindication, the earth shattering declaration that through his own suffering God is victorious and promising those who follow Jesus that their suffering will, like his, not be in vain. But then, in the latter part of this passage, Jesus our prophet speaks on God’s behalf a warning that applies to every generation – *“be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life”* - the effects of which being that you will be neither eager nor ready for the Son of Man to return *“on clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.”*

When one speaks to audiences such as this, fine church members that you are, I generally assume that you don’t spend a lot of time carousing (as we’ve come to associate that word) and that you are not often, if ever, drunk. Would that only those folks who do those sorts of things be the recipients of our Lord’s warning. But ever true to form, Jesus adds one more category *“anxieties of life”* to his list of things that might cause us to miss the signs of his coming and perhaps the opportunity to be part of it. And who lives without anxiety? If we’re poor or sick or in conflict or our party is out of power, we’re anxious about it. If we’re not poor, feeling well with nary a cloud on the relationship horizon and our party is in power – we’re anxious to keep things that way.

Anxiousness, the pressing of something on our minds, is on our Lord’s mind when he says, *“for it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth.”* If we’re drunk with worry – we’re drunk, and if we carouse around tending to this and that instead of matters of the kingdom, we’re carousers. What then are we to do? Jesus of course speaks prophetically to that – watch and pray – let nothing eclipse Jesus in your life. The world may be unraveling but if so, it simply means the kingdom of God is near. Until that happens, we keep watch through God’s word, live in that light, and pray that when the full light of Christ appears, we’ve not become so accustomed to the darkness that we turn away.

I Thessalonians 5 says *“you are not of the darkness, for that day to surprise you...you are all children of light and children of the day, we are not of the night or of the darkness.”* Watch. Dwell by faith in the light of Jesus Christ, so when that day comes, it will be clear that it’s the one you’ve been waiting for all along. AMEN