**Know How to Interpret the Signs**

Based on [Luke 21:25-36](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk21.25)

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The Second Sunday of Advent: *Populum Zion*

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God is like the author of a book. He knows the ending and all the details, but he has yet to finish writing it. And like God, we know how the book will end too. We have heard spoilers. God’s word is filled with spoilers.

Normally, you don’t want someone to so spoil a book for you. You want to be excited throughout and at the end say, “**I didn’t see that coming**.” But when it comes to the book of the world and how it comes to an end, God does not want you to be surprised. The worst thing for you is to be caught off guard, to not see it coming. ***First, because signs of the end, rightly interpreted, give us assurance of Jesus’ final redemption; and secondly, because that assurance keeps you vigilant and gives you strength to endure to the end.***

This year was the first year since 1918 that a solar eclipse traveled from coast to coast across the United States. That happened on August 21st. Hurricane Harvey reached tropical storm status on August 17th, four days before the eclipse, and it raged on travelling the Atlantic until September 3rd. Hurricane Irma began shortly before Harvey was ended. The 2017 Atlantic Hurricane season was devastating, and this amazing and unusual solar eclipse happened in the midst of it. What does it all mean?

Jesus says, **25**“**And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,”**

Was Jesus talking specifically about the 2017 Hurricane Season and Solar eclipse? Not exclusively, for there are to be many signs. It is uncanny, though. And what we can say is that 2017 fits these signs and portents of Jesus, and so we must take them as signs that the end of the world is near.

There are two narratives going on in the world today. One is that everything happens as a result of impersonal forces of nature. This includes people who think God is not present at all, far away, uninvolved and unconcerned with the unraveling of the world he created. Jesus says that **the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and that people will faint with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world.** Of course they will. Those who believe that things are getting out of control and that there’s nobody at the helm all they can do is panic and embrace anxiety. Because they don’t know that these are signs, they do not know what it all means. They have no assurance that anyone or anything can save them from what’s to come. They turn to governments and shallow promises to save them, which only increases the signs.

The other narrative is that everything happens because of God’s constant intervention and involvement, and in seemingly natural events He has something to say. On the fourth day of creation God said, “**Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for *signs* and seasons**.” One of the purposes for the sun and moon and stars was for ***signs***. Martin Luther has said, “Whatever the natural course of the heavens may be, these *signs* are always tokens of his wrath and predict sure disaster for the future.”

And the events Jesus speaks of in Luke 21are meant to be *signs..*events that *signal* something else to come. Jesus explains, “**Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.**” Celestial alignments and spectacles, what we call “natural” disasters…they mean something and contain a personal message from God to man. **“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).** **“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:4).**

Just as every rainbow that has ever happened since the flood is given to remind the faithful that God will never wipe out mankind with a flood again. So too every solar and lunar eclipse, every falling star, and every hurricane should remind the faithful that our redemption is coming.

In one sense, our redemption has already come. On the cross and in the resurrection, Jesus Christ redeemed us from all sin, death and from the power of the devil. “**O death where is your victory? O death where is your sting? Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

We have no reason to fear these enemies anymore. They have been judged, and sentenced for execution. However, they still are operative in our lives. The devil still prowls around us like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Sickness and Death still affect us—none are immune. And sin is still a part of our mortal bodies, and we must be ever vigilant, exercise discipline and self-control to keep it restrained.

This life is still a struggle, and struggle we must. And--as the days grow old and the hearts of many grow cold--we will be tempted to surrender to the spirit of the age. We will are tempted to give up the good fight of faith, and to conform our lives to the image of the world. For this reason, God has given us signs in the heavens and on earth that point to the end of the world. They will become more frequent and apparent as the worlds clock winds down, and they reminds us of how short-sighted it is to set aside his Word to pursue the vain and superficial pleasures of this life. **Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus’ words will not pass away.** And His eternal words teach that it is not in the world, but in the ending of the world that our final redemption lies--the final deliverance from all sin and evil and all danger of falling away from the Lord.

“**Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.”** Jesus is not speaking here of those who have lived during his lifetime. Some scholars try to make that argument—that Jesus taught his disciples he would return in their lifetime. But that opinion just isn’t sustainable. For one thing, Jesus says elsewhere, “**But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.**” If on earth, Jesus doesn’t know the day or the hour, why should we conclude he knows the month, or year, or century either? Jesus teaches the signs of the end, not to give us assurance of a temporal proximity to the Last Day because knowing when is not important. None of us are promised a tomorrow anyway; and even if Christ isn’t scheduled to arrive by then, death might take us. Don’t place your hope in timetables; our calling is to always be ready.

So when Jesus says, “**This generation will not pass away until all has taken place**”, he means the generation of unbelievers, of those who, despite receiving the signs--do not interpret them rightly by faith or take them seriously. He once said to the crowds, “**When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. *You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time*?**” (Luke 12:54-56).

Jesus uses the phrase “this generation” nine times in the Gospel of Luke alone; and *always about an unbelieving portion of humanity*. What Jesus is teaching about “this generation” is: don’t naively expect that the whole world will be converted and woke, such that these signs will be unnecessary. People will be eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage right up until the end. They will receive each and every sign but will not heed them; and they will go on expecting that world will remain as it is forever, and that the Lord and his reckoning will never come. // But it *will* come, and it will spring upon them like a trap, like a thief in the night. This is why Jesus final admonition in this passage is to not lose heart, but to recognize the signs as a call to vigilance, to always be ready for the day.

And with Jesus words, you can daily prepare yourselves to interpret the world according to God’s purposes. His words give sight to faith; interpreting the signs so that you may regard rightly what you see with your eyes in the world around you. Despite what technocrats and futurists will tell you, this world is not preparing itself for perfection and immortality, in separating from God to build a new babel and make a name for itself, humanity it is only storing up wrath for its own destruction, as is attested by the signs. But as the church of Christ we will not be destroyed. *Mindful of the signs* we are always have hope, not giving way to anxiety and fear but being prepared in the Spirit to resist the great apostasy and await our final redemption.

Donald Trump taunts Rocket Man as North Korea tests intercontinental ballistic missiles—it is a sign. People refuse to tolerate sound doctrine, but instead raise up teachers to scratch their itching ears—a sign. A massive solar eclipse occurs alongside a series of category 4 hurricanes—a sign. The unbeliever sees these things, says “The worlds coming to an end!” and ***panics***; the believer sees these things, says “The world’s coming to an end!” and ***rejoices.*** For those who did not know how to interpret the signs, it is the end of everything good they will ever know. For those of us who live our lives heeding the everlasting words of Jesus, it will be the beginning of a perfection we have never known.

**“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

Lord Jesus, Come quickly.