

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, YOUR REDEMPTION DRAWETH NIGH

Luke 21: 28 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Message Before The Lord's Supper At Our First Annual Intermountain
West District of the Evangelical Fellowship of Free Churches
Saturday Morning, April 30, 2011 at Beacon Bible Church, Sandy, Utah

All the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ must hate God's unpredictability. God is always on time. Yet, He doesn't tell us the exact day of Christ's return. The enemy seems bent on scheming over the last few years to get individuals or groups of believers to try to set a date for Christ's return. Why? The enemy wants to use this strategy to mock the church. Nothing probably grates any worse on the demonic world as heavily as the impending knowledge that Jesus is coming soon, and Satan and his angels do not know when. Yet, this uncertainty as to just when Jesus will return makes it unusual for any church or fellowship of churches to prepare to meet the Lord. In Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17: 21, He prays, "That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me."

Beloved, as the Evangelical Fellowship of Free Churches, one of the ways we can prepare our hearts and lives and our people for the coming of the Lord is by answering the call of Christ in His high priestly prayer. Harmony in the kingdom of God is unusual, because the world, the flesh, and the devil train us and tempt us to try to control each other, to try to manipulate, and to try to fight for the top. God wants us to stand for truth, but part of that truth He calls us to stand for as we prepare for the second coming of our King is to wash each other's feet. Preparing for our Lord's second coming includes choosing to serve. It confuses the devil's schemes when we seek harmonious relationships with fellow believers while still standing strong for truth. When we live harmoniously, even with brethren who would spitefully use us, it confuses Satan's schemes and the lies of the enemy begin to sound hollow.

We have been privileged as few believers to hear three awesome messages on the Day of the Lord. As we close out this First Annual Intermountain West District Conference, God the Holy Spirit is calling me to seek to prepare us for welcoming the soon coming of our Lord Jesus in the Rapture. Most of us have sung the Gospel song written by Gordon Jensen in 1970, "Years of time have come and gone, Since I first heard it told, How Jesus would come again some day; If back then it seemed so real, Then I just can't help but feel, How much closer His coming is today. Signs of the times are

everywhere, There's a brand new feeling in the air; Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky, Lift up your head; redemption draweth nigh. Wars and strife on every hand, And violence fills the land; Still some people doubt He'll ever come again. But the Word of God is true, He'll redeem His chosen few, Don't lose hope soon Christ Jesus will descend. Signs of the times are everywhere, There's a brand new feeling in the air, Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky, Lift up your head redemption draweth nigh."

Have any of you noticed towards the end of October, Christmas decorations start to go up. What does that mean? For one, it means Thanksgiving is very near. How do I know that? It is because Thanksgiving comes before Christmas. If stores are putting up Christmas decorations and Thanksgiving hasn't come yet, then Thanksgiving must be getting very close.

Thanksgiving always comes before Christmas. Beloved, if signs of the Day of the Lord and the coming of Anti-christ are showing up more and more, then it is time for us to lift up our heads. The Rapture of the church precedes the wrath of God being poured out in the tribulation period. I ask us today, "Are we preparing to meet the Lord?"

The message is simple today. Yet, this text is a time-sensitive message. The text before us in Luke 21: 28 is straight forward and clear. I see three verb forms that are all time sensitive in Luke 21: 28—(1) It's time to straighten up. (2) It's time to lift up our heads (3) It's time for Jesus to return--our redemption is drawing near. To put it in another way, before we share the Lord's Supper, I want us to examine three action verbs that the Word teaches—two of these we are to obediently follow The last verb is what Jesus will do, whether or not we are prepared. The last verb is sure—our redemption is drawing near. Nothing can deter our redemption from coming soon. The other two actions are God's way to prepare us for Jesus' return. These actions are up to us if we are obedient sons and daughters. Let's take a moment and look at these three verbs. The first two verbs are our actions. The last verb is God's promised action that is certain. What are these three verbs telling us today in the Intermountain West District?

IT'S TIME TO STRAIGHTEN UP. (I.) This is the first verb calling for our action, church. The little Greek word for straighten up or look up is **anakupto**. This compound Greek word is made up of two little words, first the prefix, **ana** which means up or to reverse something. The Greek word **kupto** means to bend forward, to stoop, or stoop down. The root word **kupto** comes from is **kuma** or **kuo** which means to swell with young, to be

expectant, to be pregnant, and to prepare to deliver a child. The word *anakupto* thus literally means to unbend, to rise, to prepare to be elevated, to lift up oneself, or to look up. The picture Jesus is speaking of goes back to earlier words He spoke in the Olivet Discourse. Jesus said in Matthew 24: 4-8, “See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” Jesus related more about this picture of a woman in labor, waiting imminently for her child to be born. When my wife was expecting our seven children, I went many places preaching. But when she told me she was in labor, imminent labor with labor pains coming rapidly and not far apart, I didn’t go far from her side. I knew it was time and I had better be near her. Jesus has more to say.

In John 16: 20-22, He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. Whenever a woman is in travail, she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore, you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you.”

Another similar but contrasting passage comes to mind in Paul’s word about the Day of the Lord coming like a thief in the night for the unbeliever, the unprepared. Paul writes in I Thessalonians 5: 3, 4, 9, “While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren are not in darkness, that the Day should overtake you like a thief... For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” What is the picture? It is clear that for unbelievers, the birth pangs of the Day of the Lord that we are witnessing today will overtake them and they will not escape the wrath of God. For the believer, the same birth pangs that bring judgment to earth will bring relief, release, and joy to the believer. These birth pangs are ushering in the Rapture of the Church. The Lord is saying, “Church, don’t be doubled over in birth pangs. Straighten up. Reverse your position of focusing on the bad things happening on the news. See the glory awaiting. Soon the anguish will

be no more. Look up. The Savior is ready to descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” God is calling us church—to take a reversed position to how the world sees the birth pangs that are besieging this whole world. People of God, straighten up. Look up, and rejoice as the birth pangs get closer and closer. There is a second verb calling for our action, church.

IT’S TIME TO LIFT UP OUR HEADS. (II.) This action seems to be very simple, but to do it in tough times is where we all can fail. Jesus said, “But when these things, these birth pangs begin to happen, including verses 25, 26, straighten up, and lift up your heads...” Verses 25, 26 read like news out of 2011 with the earthquakes and tsunamis. The normal response to seeing the news flashes picturing the tsunamis is to faint with fear on what is going to happen next—as folk faint from fear in the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world. The Greek word for lift up is **epairo**. This word means to raise up our heads, to lift up our heads, to hoist up our heads, almost the picture of helping our heads out with a push under our chins. You’ve all heard your parents tell you at some moment of sadness to keep your chin up. That’s *epairo*. The literal meaning of the word is the raising of a sail on a sailboat to catch the wind so the boat can go forward. There may be times in the near future, when it will take a conscious effort for us as believers and as churches to keep going when we see what is happening in our world. God is saying, “When it gets like this, do a conscious thing, make a conscious effort. Lift up your heads; raise the sails on your boat. Your redemption is coming soon.” Soon we’ll be leaving this harbor and sailing on. I love hearing the Imperials sing, “Sail on, When the water gets high, Sail on, When the wind starts to die, Sail on, It's just a matter of minutes, Till His ship comes to get us, And we'll all get in it.” Thirdly and lastly, this verb is not about us, but about Jesus returning

IT’S TIME FOR JESUS TO RETURN--OUR REDEMPTION IS DRAWING NEAR. (III.) Whether we are prepared for Jesus’ return, straightened up, with our heads lifted up, He is still coming soon. The Greek word for drawing near is **eggizo**. This verb *eggizo* comes from the root verb **eggus**. **Eggus** means to throttle or to squeeze. The picture is of a tube of tooth paste that has been squeezed until there is nothing left inside it. *Eggus* means there is almost no time left to wait for Jesus’ coming. The tarrying of the Lord is running out. *Eggizo* means to be at hand, to come near, to draw near, or to approach closely. Whether we are ready or not, Jesus is coming. Time is running out. The squeeze is on. This could be the last communion

any of us will ever celebrate here on earth. Most of us are planning communion services tomorrow morning on the first Sunday of the month of May. That's how close we are!

Biblical prophecy provides the greatest encouragement and hope available to us as believers today regarding our redemption drawing near. The Old Testament is saturated with prophecies concerning Christ's first coming. There are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament. Seventeen books out of the 39 Old Testament books, give the second coming of Christ prominence. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are 318 references to the second coming of Christ. It adds up to an amazing 1 out of every 30 verses in the New Testament speaks on Jesus returning to earth. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event called Christ's return. For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first coming, there are 8 which look forward to His second coming!

Beloved, as we come now to the Table of the Lord, how can we say the coming of Christ is imminent? Wise words of Os Guinness come back to mind. He told of going to hear Handel's Messiah performed. After two hours, he said, "If a person would have turned and said to him, 'How much longer will the performance go on?'" He said his answer would be—"About 5 minutes more. If the man questioning him would have asked, 'How can you be so sure?'" He said that his reply would be, "Don't you remember that beautiful solo?" And he would have said, 'Yes.' And that chorus?' Yes.' And then I should have said to him, "I know the score and this is the final Hallelujah Chorus." Beloved, it is a wonderful thing to "have the score," so we may follow events that lead to the second coming. Soon the present will be past, and time will be no more. Soon God's new day will dawn. We are near His coming. How near we do not know, but one thing we know for sure. We know the score and it cannot be long!

I close with words that are forever settled in heaven. Jesus spoke these words in Luke 21: 28. "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Amen.

