

“An Attitude of Gratitude”

Luke 21:25-36

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+21:25-36)

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November 22, 2009

Rise and Shine, Christ is Alive!

In this morning's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells his disciples that the Jerusalem Temple is going to be destroyed. Jesus also says that there will be earthquakes, astrological signs, and great anxiety among people. These signs and more will tell us that the Son of Man is coming to close out the age of earth. Death and destruction will be happening. Great tribulation will come upon all peoples. Now don't get too excited about these signs because Christians have lived with these signs coming and going in their lives for the last 2,000 years. Jesus tells us not to fear! We are not to become arrogant and self-righteous. Jesus tells us that the proper attitude is an attitude of gratitude! Jesus says:

“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+21:28)

We can look to people who have lived under terrible stress, awful torment, and inhuman conditions and see how the Holy Spirit helped them to actually live out the words of Jesus. Slaves in the American South would sing a song based upon Jesus' words as they worked and worshipped. The song would encourage them to look beyond their circumstances and place their hope in Christ Jesus. The song would challenge them to stand up and lift their heads to God no matter what was happening in their life at the moment. Even in the midst of terrible slavery, they could have an attitude of gratitude because the Risen Christ was with them and they had hope for a better world! Listen to the words of these slaves who place all their trust and hope in Christ. They sang “O, Rise and Shine”.

Balcony People singing!

Whenever Christ's people face difficult times they are to do what Jesus said and stand up, as opposed to sitting down, lying down, crawling, or creeping in the dark. Christ's people are to stand up with great hope. They are to lift up their heads with anticipation. Let me suggest that this thanksgiving attitude is appropriate for us right now in Michigan! As Jesus told us in Mark's Gospel, no one knows what day will be the last day. Therefore, let us stand up with great anticipation, let us lift up our heads with gratitude because Christ is Risen, Christ is here, and Christ is coming again!

Let this Thanksgiving be filled with an attitude of gratitude!

So much is made of Thanksgiving and Christmas being an economically important consumer season. Already we hear economist talking about whether this season we will buy our way out of the recession. In the minds of quite a few people we think that to be able to give means that you must go out and buy. Therefore, this becomes the make it or break it season for retail stores around the country. The marketing departments are at work all year preparing for this season. The end result: Great Anxiety! Before these next four weeks are over, almost everyone will wish it was past.

- * Parents have the addition of shopping time and money anxiety
- * School teachers will barely survive children's hyped up energy.
- * Church Musicians and Music Directors will be pulling out their hair seeking to find a way to get every thing done for the extra programs.
- * Pastors and church workers will be working overtime to prepare for the extra worship services.
- * Children will be making lists and asking for more and more each day.

Throughout this entire period we will be moving at a break neck speed. What an opportune time for parents to lose their patience with children; for husbands and wives to be at each others throats; and for everyone to forget this is supposed to be the season of peace.

Let us decide today that this Thanksgiving and Christmas season will be different in our homes and our church. Let us not place the emphasis upon what stuff we will give. Obviously, I suggest that we do not focus upon what stuff we will get.

Rather, let each of us open our hearts to experience the greatest gift God has already given—Jesus the Christ. Christ is Risen. Christ is alive! Christ is here right now! Interestingly enough, most of us have a much easier time giving than receiving. However, to accept that Christ came into this world at Christmas so that you and I might know of God's great love for each of us--well, that reality is often forgotten. It takes some doing to remember and respond with gratitude. To accept Christ's presence in our lives is to accept the promise of God's love each and every moment of our lives. Pastor James Harnish of Tampa, Florida helps us put Christ's gift of life in focus. ("An Explosion of Joy" December 24, 1996)

"A woman who was just released from Tampa General Hospital probably received the best Christmas present of anyone in the city. It came early, a week ago today to be exact. In August, she was diagnosed with severe cardiomyopathy, a rare heart disorder which causes the muscles of the heart to become inflexible. It's generally terminal. The only medical cure is a heart transplant. Over the past five months, she has become progressively weaker. More and more of her active life have been taken from her as she waits for the possibility of a new heart. At 2:00 on a dark, cold morning, she was awakened and told that the new heart was on its way. By 4:00 the heart was in place, and by 10:00 the next morning, she was out of surgery and in the ICU. When I visited with her a couple of days later, we talked about the gift of this new heart. She said, 'You know, this was the second time that someone died for me.'"

Let us decide that each day from now until Christmas we will give thanks to God for Jesus our Lord who died that we might have life today and life eternal. Let's choose to stand up, to lift up our heads and lift up our hands to God and say thank you. This year, let our attitude be one of gratitude to God!

With an attitude of gratitude comes an attitude of expectancy!

The Scripture suggests that we stand up and lift our heads, that we rise and shine for Christ. Gratitude to God lifts our heads. An attitude of expectation of God's love, God's grace, God's promise of peace and joy enables us to stand up.

I challenge you to let God's promise guide your decisions each day during these next 30 days. You can choose to build up your children with God's love. You can choose to live with God's hope. You have within you power to experience a positive Thanksgiving and Christmas season. You have a choice! Let me share with you the story of Jerry who teaches us about the power of choosing hope in the midst of difficult circumstances.

"Jerry was the kind of guy you love to hate. He was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, 'If I were any better, I would be twins!'" He was a unique manager because he had several waiters who had followed him around from restaurant to restaurant. The reason the waiters followed Jerry was because of his attitude. He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Jerry was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation. Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up to Jerry and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

Jerry replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, 'Jerry, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood.' I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.

"Yes it is," Jerry said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live life."

I reflected on what Jerry said. Soon thereafter, I left the restaurant industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it. Several years later, I heard that Jerry did something you are never supposed to do in a restaurant business: he left the back door open one morning and was held up at gunpoint by three armed robbers. While trying to open the safe, his hand, shaking from nervousness, slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him. Luckily, Jerry was found relatively quickly and rushed to the local trauma center. After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Jerry was released from the hospital with fragments of the bullets still in his body. I saw Jerry about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied, "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scars?" I declined to see his wounds, but did ask him what had gone through his mind as the robbery took place. "The first thing that went through my mind was that I should have locked the back door," Jerry replied. "Then, as I lay on the floor, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live, or I could choose to die. I chose to live. "Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked. Jerry continued, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the emergency room and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes I read, 'He's a dead man. I knew I needed to take action.'"

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Well, there was a big, burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Jerry. "She asked if I was allergic to anything. 'Yes,' I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply... I took a deep breath and yelled, 'Bullets!' Over their laughter I told them, 'I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.'"

Jerry lived thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. Attitude, after all, is everything."
(ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING By Francie Baltazar-Schwartz)

Stand up! Lift your head up! Celebrate the Risen Christ with an attitude of gratitude!

I challenge you to adopt an attitude of gratitude for the next 30 days. With Christ's help you can choose to live with your head held high with gratitude and while you stand up with expectancy to anything the world might throw at you. You can choose to live a hope filled, grateful life of peace this Christmas season. I urge you to choose a positive, abundant life with Christ Jesus.