

“There is Hope!”

You probably heard that the 41st president of the United States, George H.W. Bush, died Friday night at the age of 94. In reading up on the former president I came across two interesting religious quotes. The first one is this. A Washington Post story in 1988 quoted George H.W. Bush’s cousin, George Herbert Walker III, as saying the president espoused **“a happy Christianity, rarely dwelling on suffering or sin. It was upbeat, ‘Do your duty,’ ‘It’s a great world out there.’”** It is a great world out there is many ways. And God does want us to do our duty. But, our world and our lives are also filled with suffering and sin and just focusing on the good stuff in this world and our lives doesn’t make that go away. That’s why God sent us a Savior, Jesus Christ. Today we begin a new church calendar year and a new season of the church year called Advent. Advent has a dual purpose. We prepare ourselves to celebrate Jesus first coming to this earth to complete the plan of salvation as we also prepare ourselves for his second coming on Judgment Day. As we deal with a world and lives filled with suffering and sin Jesus wants us to know that **“there is hope.”** And as we face standing before God, our perfect judge, on Judgment Day Jesus wants us to know **“there is hope.”** Luke 21:25-36.

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 People 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 “Truly I tell you, 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 carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on 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.”

Our sermon lesson takes place during Holy Week, just a few days before Jesus died on the cross. The disciples were focused on how great a world it was out there and how beautiful the temple in Jerusalem was with it’s amazing limestone foundation stones, some weighing up to 160,000 pounds! Jesus comes with a dose of reality when he says these words: **“As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down”** (Luke 21:6). This would happen in 70 A.D. when the Romans would lay siege to the city of Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands of Jews died, the temple was destroyed (and

remains in ruins today), and thousands of the Jews that were left were enslaved and brought to Rome so the Romans could celebrate their victory over Israel. Jesus continues to go on for an entire chapter of Scripture to describe not only the destruction of Jerusalem, but also things that will happen as we wait for him to return as our judge on Judgment Day. There will be wars, natural disasters, and scary evil that will happen in this world. There will be persecution of Christians, false teachers, and false doctrine. People, including close family and friends, will betray one another and people are going to freak out because the universe and the earth are going to start showing signs that something is wrong. Jesus says, **“when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near”** (vs. 31). And then when Jesus actually returns to judge this world and the normal workings of the earth cease Jesus says, **“People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken”** (vs. 26).

Former President Bush is right that it is a great world out there in many ways, but in lots of other ways it's not and we all know it. All the signs of the end, as far as we can tell, are in place. How should we deal with that truth and also the suffering and sin? Should we allow our hearts to be **“weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap”**? (vs. 34). In other words, should we self-medicate with food, drugs and alcohol, materialism and worldly entertainment, or just good old fashioned chew your finger nails off and give yourself an ulcer worry?

Jesus would suggest a different path – there is real hope! **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”** (vs. 33). Even Judgment Day can't destroy the real hope promises God's makes in the Bible. I would like to share another quote with you from former president George H.W. Bush. In an interview back in 2012 Bush said he was coming to terms with his own mortality and believed in an afterlife. **"I've wondered about [heaven]. Who you see when you get there. Who do you look up? How do you find them? There's a lot of people there. Maybe you look around, find some didn't make it, too. ... I don't know how that works. I don't think anybody knows,"** he said. **"I don't fear it, though. "When I was a little guy, I feared death. I'd worry about it. I'd be scared. Not anymore."** While not as “Lutheran” clear as we might want it to be former President Bush was a Christian who belonged to Christian churches that believe that Jesus Christ is Savior alone. Notice in his quote that he says he is not afraid of death or eternity. That is the certain gift of hope that Jesus Christ gives. **“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”** (vs. 28). Jesus came to this earth the first time to give the gift of hope by redeeming sinners like you and me. He made the payment necessary through his perfect life and innocent death so that we are free from the wrath of God in Hell and free from fear of death and Judgment Day. We don't need to avoid the topics of suffering, sin, and Judgment Day. We can face them head on because there is certain hope through Jesus Christ. So as we deal with life and we face the end of the world, let's face these things with the certain hope that one day in Heaven we will be free from suffering and sin. Let's hold on to Jesus promise of hope that will never pass away. **“By standing firm you will gain life”** (Luke 21:19). Amen.