

*25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

*29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

Be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Not so many years ago some Christian groups were predicting a breakdown in society. Groceries would no longer be on the shelves in the stores, banks would call in their loans, there would be disorder in the streets. They proclaimed that Christians should prepare for this time. Stock up on canned goods, have a year's supply. Get rid of all your debt. Be prepared to defend yourself. Or else you and your family may get pulled into the whirlwind of chaos that is coming.

I was reminded of the days of building bomb shelters that happened back in the late fifties. Nuclear war may come at any time. Build a shelter in your back yard so that when the bomb falls you and your family will be safe.

Or even the warning that came on the radio on Friday morning: Time to move your investments out of stocks and into bonds.

Back in the bomb shelter days many were wondering what a Christian would do if the bombs were about to fall and the neighbors came knocking on the shelter door and there was not room or food inside for all.

I wondered the same as a friend told me he was stocking food for the time of chaos that was coming. Will he open his kitchen to share with me when my food runs out?

Or what would you do if you were the wise one who got out of the market at just the right time while all of our investments crashed? Would you share with us all or would you stay away, so that you would not need to be reminded that we are sisters and brothers in Christ?

*“Be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man.”*

Noah escaped. Noah and his family escaped. When the rains came God had prepared Noah so that while the whole world was drowning Noah was in the ark floating above all the death, carrying in the ark a new beginning.

But you were not baptized into Noah nor called by Noah's name. Noahites might indeed set their hearts and minds on doing all that is possible to not get caught in the crowd when the day of trouble comes. Noahites might have a safe haven prepared far from the chaos of the inner city. Noahites might live in walled developments and hire guards to protect them when hungry hoards come looking for food.

Noahites might keep a stash of gold or diamonds to trade with when the paper dollars are worthless.

Noahites will have their food for tomorrow stocked in the basement with no need to pray for daily bread.

But you are named Christians.

What could it mean for a Christian to escape all these things that will take place?

The flood washed over our Lord. Jesus spoke of his death as a baptism, all the flood of chaos washed over him as they mocked and condemned and crucified him.

In his dying he became one with everyone who does not escape - one with all those drowned in Noah's day - one with all those who starve in famine or war - one with all those whose family and friends desert them.

Frankly, I'd rather be one with Noah. A survivor.

But God has made me and you one with Christ.

*“Be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

Who will have escaped to stand before Jesus? Those who can run away the fastest in time of sickness? Or those who in love remain, risking their health in caring for the dying?

Who will be ready to stand before Jesus? Those with a great store of food that they are ready to protect from the starving ones? Or those who give what they have, trusting in God for tomorrow's bread?

Who will be ready to stand before Jesus? Those who have sealed their lives off from the suffering of others, or those who share it?

*“Be alert,” Jesus said, “praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

There is no greater danger to the church of Jesus Christ than times of prosperity. We might all think that God has plans for us to be Noah when the flood comes.

But this morning as the flood washes over William, we are all reminded that baptism is our entry into Christ. Christ - not Noah - is our way, our truth, our life.

What should we pray for? That we will not suffer? No.

Pray that we may be like Jesus who when he was reviled did not revile in return.

Pray that we may be like Jesus, not running away to save his own skin but praying for the Father's will to be done in us as we give our lives in love.

Pray that we may be like Jesus, not saved by our own plotting and planning and foresight, but trusting in God through cross and grave, until that new morning dawns.

Be alert - pray that you may escape the greed, and the turning upon others who are weaker, and the abandoning those in need that tempts us all. Pray that God will so strengthen your hearts in holiness and love that you will be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.