

Being Strengthened to Stand in Victory in the End Times (Lk. 21:36)

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I. JESUS SPOKE AS PROPHET AND PASTOR: BE AN OVERCOMER IN THE END TIMES

A. Jesus prophesied that distressing events preceding His return would come as a snare to test all people (v. 25, 35). He called His people to be strengthened to escape the snare of sin and fear and to stand in victory (v. 36). He warned them not to allow their hearts to be weighed down (v. 34), and gave pastoral exhortations: to *take heed to themselves* (v. 34) and to *watch and pray* (v. 36).

*²⁵“There will be...on the earth distress of nations...²⁶men’s hearts failing them from fear...²⁸When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near...³²this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place...³⁴But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.³⁵For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on...the whole earth. ³⁶Watch...pray always that you may be counted worthy [*have strength*] to escape all these things...to stand before the Son of Man.” (Lk. 21:25-36)*

B. **Distress of nations:** The intensity of the distress will continue to increase until the end. People will respond differently: some will *faint with fear* (v. 26), but others will be *filled with faith*, “looking up” to King Jesus instead of only “looking out” at the growing distress (v. 28). The distress will include financial crisis, terrorism, racial clashes, violent weather, persecution, etc.

⁴⁸[Jesus said], “...to whom much is given, from him much will be required.” (Lk. 12:48)

C. **Your redemption:** The ever-increasing display of God’s power will lead to His return. It will be the *optimum context* for the greatest number of people to grow to the deepest levels of love.

D. **Begin:** Believers are to recognize when these things *begin* in the generation Jesus returns (v. 28, 32). The end-time distress of nations will have a recognizable beginning, increasing in intensity over a generation, and culminating at His return. A generation may last 100 years (Gen. 15:13-16).

E. **Unexpected:** People surprised by the increasing distress will be more vulnerable to fear (v. 34).

F. **Snare:** Snares, or traps, were used in NT times to capture animals for food. A baited snare was *hidden* to lure prey into the trap, and designed to *hold* its prey, by making escape difficult.

G. Jesus highlighted three emotional snares that will weigh hearts down and cause people to fall.

1. **Carousing (dissipation):** This speaks of *over-indulgence* that dissipates or diminishes one’s spiritual strength—through immorality or other pleasures outside of God’s will.

2. **Drunkenness:** Many people seek to escape their pain and pressure by finding comfort in mind-altering substances rather than seeking freedom by connecting with Jesus.

3. **Cares of life:** Many will be overcome with anxiety that results in bitterness toward those who block their goals concerning their position, provision, protection, etc. (v. 26, 34).

II. TWO EXHORTATIONS: TAKE HEED, AND WATCH AND PRAY (LK. 21:34, 36)

- A. God's people must be strengthened to escape the snare of sin and fear and stand in victory (v. 36).

³⁴***Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life...***³⁶***Watch...and pray always that you may be counted worthy [have strength] to escape all these things...and to stand before the Son of Man.*** (Lk. 21:34-36)

- B. **#1 Take heed to yourselves:** We must make it a priority to access God's grace made available in Christ. Defilement of the heart will be far more dangerous than the external distress of nations.
 1. **Have strength:** A vibrant spiritual life leads to courage and zeal for God. The phrase "*be counted worthy*" (v. 36, NKJV) is translated as "*have strength*" in most modern Bible translations. An NKJV footnote offers "*to have strength*" as an alternate translation. The idea is to be *strengthened to respond* to the Lord in a way that is *worthy* of who He is.
 2. **Weighed down:** A heart weighed down with sin and fear is *unresponsive to Jesus*. What we do with our body greatly affects the spiritual condition of our heart; drunkenness, immorality, etc., cause us to lose godly perspective, courage, and motivation to seek God.
 3. **To stand:** Believers can *stand in victory* as overcomers, rather than falling in sin, etc.
 4. **To escape:** God's people are to be *prepared spiritually* to escape the trap of falling into sin and giving way to lust, drunkenness, fear, deception, etc.
- C. **#2 Watch and pray:** Jesus gave His people practical pastoral counsel to watch and pray. Both Jesus and Paul emphasized the call to "*watch*" in the context of describing pressure in the end times (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 21:36; Rev. 16:15; cf. 1 Thes. 5:6).
 1. **Watch:** This exhortation *focuses on the mind*—we grow in understanding by watching the biblical signs of the times unfold. As our understanding increases, it produces greater urgency in us. By *watching* what the prophetic scriptures say about the end-time distress in the nations, people can see prophecy progressively unfold before them. As people watch, they inevitably talk about what is occurring and how it lines up with biblical prophecy. Thus, they connect with more people who have a common urgency and vision.
 2. **Pray:** This exhortation *focuses on the heart*—we grow in strength by connecting with Jesus. Prayer strengthens our heart and releases His resources into the earthly realm. (***Prayers to Strengthen Our Inner Man***: see mikebickle.org/resources/resource/3637).

- D. **Summary:** We are to position ourselves to receive greater *insight* (by watching) to understand what the Lord is doing, and greater *strength* (by prayer) to love well as pressures increase. Those who grow in *understanding* and *strength* will be strengthened to stand as overcomers.

- E. Jesus' call to watch and pray is a call to empower believers to love others well. ***Multitudes will need the help of those walking in power and courage, with insight into what God is doing.*** People with understanding will be a part of the solution rather than contributing to the confusion.