

25th S. after Pentecost

November 22, 2009

Text: Mark 13:24-31

24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Hymn: "Jerusalem, My Happy Home" [LSB 673]

Prayer: May we always rest upon His Words of Promise which will not pass away.

Sermon Title: "Paradise Is Just Around the Corner"

Sermon Outline:

- I. The last days of which Jesus speaks were already predicted.
 - a. "*the day of the Lord*"- Joel 3:14-21; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 15
 - b. "*behold, the days are coming*" Jeremiah 9:25; Amos 4:2; 8:11
 - c. "*one like a son of man*" Daniel 7:13-14
- II. Jesus taught His inner circle of disciples about the last days.
 - a. Signs in the sun, moon, and stars.
 - b. Heaven and earth will pass away.
- III. Christ's second coming will be the occasion of final deliverance and salvation for God's people.
- IV. We believers joyfully anticipate His second coming because His Words "will not pass away".

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father, and from Jesus Christ, His Son. Amen.

"But in those days," Jesus was saying to an inner circle of His disciples, "in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." We just heard this read. It's in the beginning of our Gospel reading this Sunday.

If you heard the Gospel reading, or if you read it, what sticks out the most to you? Is it all the gloom and doom? When reading all Jesus told His disciples in this text it's hard to miss all the scary stuff. The sun darkening, the moon going dark, stars falling, and the heavens shaking, how much worse could it get?

The end of the world- many have quite the fascination in that sort of stuff. I've seen a lot of advertisements for the movie 2012. My wife and I have been to see the Mayan ruins in Mexico. There is quite the fascination all around the world over the fact that the Mayan calendar ends right at the year 2012. Books, fiction and nonfiction have been written. Scores of movies have been produced having something to do with end of life as we know it on earth. Then, adding to all that, we hear a whole lot of bad stuff in the news.

Question is, if the end of anything is so scary, why do we want to be entertained by such thoughts? Is it fascinating to so many because it is such a mystery of what the end of the world would be like? Or, is it denial that it really could happen? "Ah, something like that could never happen anyway." I say, let's leave in the Lord's hands. Let's hear what Jesus has to say when it comes to anything about the 'end of the world'. Because in Jesus only is truth found, and that truth sets us free. Amen? Amen!

Let's first consider Jesus' words, 'in those days.' If we were to read chapter thirteen from which our text comes from, anyone would find that it's difficult to figure out whether Jesus was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem or end of the entire world when judgment would fall upon the earth. Or, was He was referring to both.

And, Jesus' words "after that tribulation" do little to alleviate the difficulty. These apostles just heard from Jesus, at this point, they would be arrested and beaten for the sake of the Lord. He had just told them that family members would turn against one another because of the faith. They also heard there would be false signs, false christs on the scene. And, we know from the Epistles that these things had started already in apostolic times.

Clearly, however, in verse 26 and 27, it's quite clear Jesus' attention is on the end times. Even before that in verses 24 and 25, the darkening of the sun, the moon going dim, and the heavens shaking, are all inescapable reality of judgment day itself. In II Peter we find reference to this, "the heavens will disappear with a roar" (3:10). In Isaiah "the sky will be rolled up like a scroll" (Isaiah 34:4). The way Scripture speaks of the end makes it very clear that it will be the end, and that there will be no where to hide.

These last days which Jesus was speaking had already been predicted for centuries before. For instance we find the "day of the Lord" mentioned in Joel, Amos, and Obadiah. In Jeremiah and Amos, again, we find the words, "behold, the days are coming." In the Book of Daniel we find the words "one like a son of man" will appear. That which Jesus was speaking was not something new and certainly should not have been anything unfamiliar to these disciples.

Certainly, the "day of the Lord" will be a day of judgment. It will be, the Lord's day, not anyone else's. His judgment will be inescapable. There will be no where for anyone to hide. And, no one will be able to hide anything about himself. All be in Jesus' clear sight. "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." Jesus taught His disciples.

Wouldn't it be nice to know when this is going to happen? So we can, much the same way we count down the days on a calendar to some great event or holiday, keep track of the days until the Lord comes? And, really, Jesus taught His disciples about the signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And, that when we see the signs we know the day is near. (Pause) Jesus said these things to those disciples close to 2000 years ago, and these very things were going on then even.

When the end will be cannot be measured. It cannot be timed out or calculated. Jesus even went on to say to His disciples, “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. But concerning that day or that hour,” Jesus continued, “no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” He goes on to encourage the disciples to “keep awake” then, “stay awake,” because it can happen at any moment.

All-in-all, what Jesus was teaching His disciples, they needed to always be ready. Hence, since that is what He was teaching His disciples that is what He is teaching us too. We need to be ready at all times. The disciples were, and we are, living in the end times. Jesus’ return can happen at any moment. Yes, Judgment Day is, friends, just around the corner, and we don’t know how fast we are moving around the corner.

So,... “do not try to figure out when His return will happen, just know that it could be anytime.” “Do not ever be unprepared.” Friends, the uncertainty of the day and hour of Jesus’ return can really make us uneasy.

Do we need to be uneasy, though? Does it ever have to be, that when we are reminded of Jesus’ second coming that we become uncomfortable? Could we ever be excited about it? Yes, His judgment is will cover then entire earth and there will be no where to go where it will not find you, but does this need to scare us?

No, just as there was no reason to fear Jesus’ first coming, there is certainly no reason to fear His second. Jesus says, “stay awake”. Friends, in every way that we need to be prepared for that day, our Lord has prepared us that very way. He wants to find us that day as forgiven for our sins, well, He has pronounced us forgiven. We need to be found righteous and holy, He has declared us righteous and holy. He wants to find us that day with full trust and faith in Him, He has seen to it that the Holy Spirit has created and sustained that very faith in our hearts. Friends, we are ready, the same Jesus who will come in power and glory, is the same Jesus who has seen to it that we are ready for His coming. It is what He has spoken concerning us. It is His Word, His Promise that makes us prepared. And that Word, what He has spoken, will never go away or fade in power.

Yes, much of what Jesus speaks of to His disciples in this text is scary for many. And, certainly, the Lord’s judgment is not only scary but terrible for the unforgiven sinner. Yet, we have been forgiven.

You know, how exciting a day the day of our Lord’s return is going to be for us...and,...for our Lord, Jesus Christ. Where we will be taken that day, is exactly where He has wanted us to be from all eternity. Things are bad and rough on this earth. We struggle all the way from what is in our very core, sinfulness, to what surrounds us in this world. The entire universe travails in pain over sin.

Christ’s second coming is certainly the occasion of final deliverance from this place,...but it will also be the final deliverance from our own sinfulness. What is included in that is our fear of the Lord’s judgment. Yes, we do become scared of His judgment from time to time. Those are our moments of unbelief. And, even those moments are sin our Lord paid for upon the Cross with His own life.

Anything less than joyful anticipation of Christ’s coming is sinful, friends. That is exactly what the Lord had to die for- our sin. And, thus, in the same way, He has prepared us for His coming. What a day it is going to be. No more remembrance of sin, or the struggles we’ve had. But only perfection all around us, that’s what we will receive. We have been made prepared to receive that very thing.

Friends, let’s rejoice that the day is near. When He witness the signs Jesus taught us about, let us not become anxious or fearful, but let us rejoice for we have been reminded that He has not forgotten us, but He keeps us prepared, and our Lord is excited to take us the place He has prepared for us. We are ready, it is His Word, His Promise that we are, and His Word will not pass away. Friends, our Lord’s day, the day of His coming, is just around the corner. And, that certainly means, Paradise, is Just Around the Corner. Amen.