

“THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: Mark 13:24-37

Introduction.

This morning we will conclude Mark 13 and then break for Advent. When we come back to Mark in 2014 I have timed it so we will finish the last three chapters through Lent and end with the resurrection on Easter.

When we moved here from OKC back in 2007 I remember driving west through Kansas and Colorado and beginning to see the Rockies loom in the distance, a huge line of majestic mountains. As we got closer we began to make out the difference between the front range and the back range.

When we read in Scripture prophecy about the end times it's like looking at a mountain range. From a distance it looks like a bunch of mountains, but as you get closer you realize some of the prophecies are about the near future and some are about the distant future.

The first half of Mark 13 was about the near future, things that happened in the apostles' life time. This week we will look at the back range, prophecies of what is yet to come. It's possible they could take place in our life time so we ought to pay particular interest.

Mark 13:24-27, the coming of the Son of Man in the last days.

Verse 24 marks a dramatic shift in Jesus' teaching, "But in those days ..." Before he was describing earthly events that people could run away from. Now Jesus' language changes and becomes what's called "apocalyptic," meaning He's talking about the end of time and the end of the world.

Jesus uses prophetic language and poetic terms. He speaks of a darkening sun and moon, falling stars, shaking heavens and a coming Son of Man with hosts of angels. This answer is very different from the previous answer. Both described cataclysmic events, one that's small, local, earthly, and another that's cosmic and universal.

The coming of the Son of Man will be no small thing. It will convulse the universe. Next week we will remember the incarnation. It had its star in the east, its angel visitations and heavenly choir, yet it was an infant born almost unnoticed to a poor woman.

The Second Coming will be utterly unlike the first, it will pull out all the stops. This will exceed all the earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and floods put together. And everyone will notice.

II Peter 3:10 The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Just as there was soon going to be a shaking and a destruction of the whole Jewish system of religion, so there will be a shaking and destruction of the whole system of the heavens and the earth. There will be terror and confusion and panic all over the earth.

When the end of time comes you won't have to worry about false messiahs. You will know the real Messiah when He comes with His angels in glory, riding on a great cloud with great power. All will see and know, there will be no mistaking it.

When you see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with His angels, you will know that's the end of the world as we know it.

The Second Coming.

At the second coming several things will happen all at once. It will be a singular, cataclysmic event of universal proportions. It will outdo Hollywood's best efforts. Even Stephen Spielberg will be impressed.

First, Christ Himself will appear and be visible to every human eye in His real, literal, physical body.

Second, the holy angels of heaven will descend with Christ along with all the souls of those who are with Christ in heaven. All the graves on earth will be opened and then all the elect in Christ, those who have died and those who are alive on earth when He comes will receive resurrection bodies and those who were dead will be reunited with their souls.

Just as the flood didn't begin until Noah and his family were safely in the ark and just as the judgment of Sodom didn't begin until Lot's family was out of town, so the wrath of God will not be poured out in judgment on the earth until all the believers are safely gathered in.

This is called the rapture, after which the judgment of all mankind will take place, each one receiving His just reward. After this there will be the great separation of believers and unbelievers. The wicked will be cast into the eternal lake of fire with Satan. The righteous will be raised to eternal life and glory in heaven with Christ.

Then the earth will be judged, cleansed and completely restored. All the saints will reign with Christ over the new heavens and the new earth for all eternity in sinless perfection and freedom. And of Christ's reign there will be no end.

What this means is we are currently living in the millennium. We are in the last days waiting for the last day. Christ has already won the decisive victory over Satan, sin and death. The gospel is being preached to the nations, Christ is ruling and reigning and restraining the power of Satan.

We are living in the end times when the church of Jesus Christ is undergoing a great period and testing and trial and tribulation.

Our comfort and ease in the United States has blinded us to what the church of Jesus Christ has been experiencing all over the world for the past two millennia.

When we say the Second Coming is a single, cataclysmic event, we are saying there won't be two comings or two resurrections of saints. There isn't a rapture of the church and a later coming of judgment. When Christ comes, the graves will be opened, believers will be raptured and the great, final judgment will follow immediately.

It's worth noting that in this glorious vision of the future Jesus has made no mention of the millennium, the battle of Armageddon, a restored Israel or a rebuilt temple. Those details and symbols are incidental to the central truth of Jesus' future coming in power and glory to gather His own to Himself.

Mark 13:28-31, the lesson of the fig tree.

This brief parable of the fig tree is an interlude, a flash back to the present where Jesus talks about the front range of mountains again, the fall of Jerusalem. Lesson of the fig tree takes us back two chapters and two days to the fig tree Jesus cursed and withered as a sign of the destruction of the temple.

This explains His comment about generations. If He was talking about the end times then it would be hard to explain which generation doesn't pass away until these things take place.

But He is talking about the present generation of the disciples.

Then Jesus says something quite astonishing. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

He is saying that His words will outlive heaven and earth. That's a staggering, undeniable claim to absolute authority, a claim that can only be made by God.

Mark 13:32-37, no one knows the hour so stay awake.

Mark 13:32 "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

"Concerning that day" brings us back to the back range, matters concerning the end times.

How can Jesus not know the time? Jesus has two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. While on earth He veiled His divinity and His omniscience. As God He knew all things, as man He limited Himself and submitted His life and will to His Father.

If Jesus and the angels don't know the time, then it's sinfully arrogant for us to press into knowing such things. Every PERSON who has made a prediction is a fool. It's a great sin to seek to know what even the Son of Man submits to not knowing.

We are not to look at current events and try to plot out when Jesus will return. Will it be in my life time or my children's life time? The time is getting closer, but how close? We will know when we see the Son of Man coming on the clouds.

Jesus calls us to live by faith, in hope and expectation and longing without knowing the time. The uncertainty of the time keeps it a fresh possibility and keeps us ready. To be faithful Christians means focusing on obedience in the present and not predicting the future.

The point is this, knowing isn't the most important thing, obedience is the most important thing, faithfully *working* and *watching*.

Work and Watch.

Work.

Jesus tells a parable of slaves not knowing when the master would return but having work that must be done. It's not their concern *when* the master returns, it's their concern to do what he has commanded.

Do you remember as a child being told to do something then not doing it until all of a sudden you heard dad coming and you quickly rushed into diligent action? Or you as a parent have approached an unclean bedroom only to hear a rush into action of up until now disobedient children? Or you have been on a job where there was a lot of lollygagging until the boss showed up? Don't be that way with Jesus.

The danger of not knowing the time is that it produces idleness and slothfulness. Jesus is warning against this. His warning is meant to be a stimulus to watchfulness and preparation.

God has created each of us and given life to each of us to labor in His vineyard, to do something useful. As the seasons of our life change, that work may change but we are not called to laziness or idleness. Even when we retire from our careers, we never retire from the Lord's service. We are always His servants and witnesses, salt and light.

We should be concerned for this present generation of young people, many of whom are lazy and slothful, who aspire to nothing more than to play video games and surf the internet. Pleasure and ease are their god. They know nothing of hard work and making a contribution to society.

The latest gaming system, Xbox One released on Friday for \$500 and sold more than a million copies in the first 24 hours. Sony's PlayStation Four launched a week ago Friday and also sold a million copies in the first 24 hours.

A couple of hours a week is one thing, but what about several hours a day. What is that doing to the mind and heart and soul of our younger generation? And the older generation veg'ing out in front of the TV has not been a good example. In another generation I fear Jesus could return and no one will notice as they sit in dark rooms staring at video screens.

Don't let your children follow that path. Teach them the lessons of hard work and of service, of giving to others. Follow the example of the young parents yesterday who brought their children along to help clean yards.

LCS does well to require service hours each year. But it's the parent's responsibility to instill a good work ethic and to teach the value of working hard. About the best compliment a parent can receive from another adult is that their son or daughter is a good worker, diligent, on time, follows through, can see what needs to be done and takes the initiative to do it.

Parents, model and teach balance, work, play, reading, talking, getting out side, doing things for others, unhooking and disconnecting regularly.

We have never owned a gaming system of any kind. More out of benign disinterest than moral intention. But I don't think our guys are much the worse for it. Maybe they are a little behind on the hand-eye coordination thing, but how bad is that.

Moms and dads, pay attention, stay involved, don't give your children over to endless hours on mindless, soulless, wasting pursuits. What will we be doing when the Lord returns?

Watch.

These are Jesus' last words about the last things and the last days. Interestingly they aren't about signs and wonders, they aren't about symbols and numbers and great cosmic battles. Four times in these last six verses He warns to stay awake and watch.

The doorkeeper has one job, to be alert and to watch. To be ready to announce and receive the Master when he comes.

Watch, be on your guard, be alert, keep watch over your souls. Live ready to meet the Lord. Be aware of the dangers of spiritual apathy or neglect. Consider how you use your time and live your lives and raise your children and spend your resources.

I Thessalonians 5:6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Watch against sin, against every kind of sin. Don't say there is time or it's OK for now. We don't know the hour or the day. But we also don't know the power of hidden sin and how deeply it can become rooted and how hard to get out.

Romans 13:12-14 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and

drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Watch against doubt and unbelief. Take Jesus at His word, trust His promises and live them.

Watch against the subtleties of false doctrine and false teachers who say what our itching ears want to hear and lead us astray.

Watch against inconsistency and hypocrisy and being conformed to this world and its ways.

Watch against slothfulness and neglect, failing to attend to prayer and Scripture.

Watch against pride, selfishness, bitterness, discontent, and a critical spirit toward others.

“Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

The point of Jesus’ teaching is not to give us special knowledge or to satisfy our curiosity about the future, it’s to admonish us to faithfulness and obedience in the present day.

The end is unknown and will come suddenly like a thief in the night. Live ready. Watch and pray, watch and pray.

Mark 13:37 What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Application and conclusion.

So if no one has any clue about the hour or day, then why bother read and study the prophecies about the future? Jesus would have us know such things that we might profit from them concerning the good things that are yet to come and the comfort and hope they give us now.

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

These words of Jesus are meant to give us hope in the midst of the trials and troubles of this age.

This would be especially important for the disciples who are about to see Him killed. Do not lose hope and do not lose courage and do not lose patience.

Long to hear that trumpet sound, that sound that will ring out for all the earth to hear, that sound that will strike terror in the hearts of the unrepentant and will sound joy in the hearts of all the elect of the earth.

As Paul says, we should not only long for His appearing but love His appearing.

II Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Long for His appearing, love His appearing, pray for His appearing, “Thy kingdom come” and “Come, Lord Jesus, come.”

Prayer: Maranatha, Lord Jesus. Come quickly. Make our hearts to long for your coming and to be free from this body of death, to be free from all sin and evil. And until then stir our hearts to readiness and action. Stir our hearts to faithfulness and obedience. Awaken the younger generation out of this screen induced stupor and prepare a generation ready to serve and make ready the day of your coming. Do this that there may be faith on earth at you coming.