

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Last Sunday of Pentecost

November 21, 2021

Psalm 93:1–5 (ESV):

The Lord Reigns

93 The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt.
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.
2 Your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.

3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.

4 Mightier than the thunders of many waters,
mightier than the waves of the sea,
the LORD on high is mighty!

5 Your decrees are very trustworthy;
holiness befits your house,
O LORD, forevermore.

First Reading: Isaiah 51:4–6 (ESV):

4 “Give attention to me, my people,
and give ear to me, my nation;
for a law will go out from me,
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.

5 My righteousness draws near,
my salvation has gone out,
and my arms will judge the peoples;
the coastlands hope for me,

and for my arm they wait.
6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and they who dwell in it will die in like manner;
but my salvation will be forever,
and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

EPISTLE: Jude 20–25 (ESV):

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Gospel: Mark 13:24–37 (ESV):

The Coming of the Son of Man

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.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

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.

No One Knows That Day or Hour

32 “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. **34** It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. **35** Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— **36** lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. **37** And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Sermon 47 – Last Sunday of Pentecost

“End Look”

Mark 13:24-32

Dear friends,

Endings are powerful, the end of the world and the universe as we know it is even more so. This is the time of year we start to think about ending, because the season is turning and our year has just about ended. Jesus speaks on this in our Gospel lesson, and He answers a few questions about it. He talks a bit about how it will end, but He also talks about why and what we now are supposed to do with this information. This is supposed to be encouragement but a lot of Christians don't take it that way, and I will discuss that a little bit as well. The end is our end, it is the end of sin and the end of pain and the end of evil men. This is good and we should look at it that way.

This chapter comes near the end of the Gospel of Mark, fittingly. Jesus is about to give the disciples the Lord's Supper and He is about to be crucified. All the miracles have been done. The teaching isn't done yet but its winding down. Jesus talks before this about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which leads to some occasional confusion because He seems to relate these two things somehow. Obviously the temple was destroyed 2000 years ago, but Jesus makes it sound like the two events – the end of the

world and the end of Jerusalem – will be back to back. The answer to this is that they are thematically related, not related in terms of when they will happen. What I mean is, a lot of the destruction, the chaos, the anarchy, both within the geology and weather of planet Earth, and within humanity, will be similar between the two. Jerusalem is destroyed by men, specifically, Roman armies led by a general named Titus, who would become emperor of Rome a couple years afterward. So Romans destroy Jerusalem, and they do it the Roman way, by reducing it, starving it, and then going in with swords and fire and tearing the whole thing down. There's a lot of breakdown in that time, Jewish society breaks down, its every man for himself, the Roman armies destroy a lot of countryside, so the sky is black all the time with fires, nothing grows because its all been burned or taken. It's just a bad time to be alive. Jesus uses all this as an illustration for what the end of the world will be like. There's similarities.

Here's what He says: **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.”** This could all describe the downfall of a great nation. This could all describe the destruction of Jerusalem. He's using similar language. But the scope of it is too big, even if Jesus is being poetic. Roman armies cannot make the stars fall. They could do a lot, but that was beyond their power. Roman armies cannot make the powers of the heavens shake. Only God can do these things. When Christ returns, all creation will tremble. The distant stars, our earth itself, will reel and shake. The word apocalypse means vision or giving of knowledge, but there's a reason we associate that word with destruction and disaster, and this is it.

Why do this? I've had this question asked of me from time to time. Why does Earth, why does all creation, need to be destroyed? The answer is both quick and unpleasant, and it is simply, because of us. We are tied to this world, you and I, what happens to it happens to us, and what happens to us, happens to it. God made us to rule over the world, He made us from the dust of the Earth, and so He linked us to the earth in a very primal and intrinsic way. When Adam and Eve sinned, they didn't just stain our species with that sin, bringing that sin into our DNA. No. They stained the whole world with it. They tainted

the Earth itself with sin, and we continue to do this. Think of yourself and your sins this way, they don't stay in you. They don't just hurt those around you. They pollute the very ground that you walk on. They contaminate the water, the air, the animals. That's why Fluffy, Fido, and Scruffles (or whatever you guys name your pets) die. Because of us.

This is all very depressing, but it doesn't have to be. This world is a place of great evil, and if you find yourself mourning that it has to be destroyed, if you find yourself sad about that, I encourage you to remember the latest tragedy, the latest injustice, the latest thing done in Washington or Europe or even just down the street that makes your teeth grind in frustration. Mankind is wicked and self-destructively foolish. That is why the world needs to end. That is why we need to end. Jesus' return is not some arbitrary punishment by a stern and unforgiving God. Jesus' return is a long-overdue ending of all wickedness. We should look to that as the way to end evil, not our own efforts here on this Earth.

So Jesus will return. What does that look like? **“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.”** Not only filling some details about what, this also tells us why. Jesus' return is not about the punishment of evil, but the saving of the elect. That is, your salvation. That is why Jesus returns, and that is why God times Jesus' return precisely. He waits for the right time so He can save as many as can be saved. You are the elect, each of you. You believe because God has, from before time, engineered your salvation to happen just the way He wants it. The coming of Jesus Christ is Jesus coming to retrieve you, whether you are waiting with Him in heaven or on Earth. Jesus brings His people together, He gathers them together. You see this in miniature in the church, where we are all coming from different families, ages, and walks of life. That is a forecast of what Jesus will do over the whole Earth, bringing all that believe in Him to be together with Him and with each other. Part of being a Christian is waiting for this day, still going about your life, but always occasionally glancing toward the horizon, hoping that Jesus will come back.

The end of the world sounds depressing because the world is all we know, but Jesus' words here remind us that it is intended to be the opposite. It is for our encouragement that Jesus says these words, because the world is not where we truly belong. The world is where Satan rules, where sin rules, and it always will be. We modern people have eliminated a great many things that used to be wrong with the world, and one of the devil's most seductive lies is that if we do it just right, we can make the world a perfect place, or at least close enough to satisfy most people. But that is a lie. Progress itself is not a lie, but a progress means you have a destination. The world is progressing, yes, but it is progressing towards this final judgment.

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.” This sounds almost hilarious, given that Jesus spoke these words 2000 years ago and He has yet to return. But one of the challenges the Scriptures present us with is holding onto that sense that its about to happen even when years and whole generations pass. Jesus does not lie. He says that He is at the very gates, it's about to happen. That was true back then, and it is still true now. It seems like those things would be mutually exclusive, but all that serves to remind us is that God does not think of time the same way we do. Jesus will return.

But He hasn't yet, so what do we do with it now? Jesus Himself answers this question with one simple sentence in the last verse. Stay awake. Obviously this can't be literal, we need sleep, God built us this way, so how do we stay awake? By keeping our Christianity awake. Ready for Jesus to return. Jesus comes for the elect, He comes for those that believe in Him, so to stay ready is to stay believing. That's harder when the chips seem like they're down. We believe in Jesus, but so many do not, and this is sad. Jesus doesn't tell us to make other people ready, though. He tells us to make ourselves ready. Live as God's repentant children, know you're sinners and need forgiveness. Recognize the wickedness of the world for what it is, and develop a craving for an end to

that. There's a lot of nice things here, and we can be fond of them, its fine, but best not get too fond. The nice things here are temporary. What Jesus gives us is forever. Whet your appetite for real, good work, virtuous living, true justice, real truth. Look to God to one provide you all these things. Seek out that which is actually good and actually true, not the nonsense the world tries to shovel at us. Seek out God and listen to Him, even when He says the same old thing. These are what make us ready. A sense of unworthiness, that we aren't righteous people, also makes us ready. A hunger and a thirst for righteousness, for good things. All these things help us look to Jesus as the founder and perfecter of our faith. We don't get them here, we get them from Him, and one day He will come back to give us all good things eternally.

Amen.