

THE DAY OF SALVATION

Mark 13:1-13

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

November 18, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 13, verses 1 through 13. It is on page 719 of the pew Bible. Three days before his crucifixion Jesus tells his disciples about the destruction of the temple and the many tribulations they would face. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 13, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" ² And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

⁹ "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is coming again. The whole world will see him. Even the dead will see him, because they will be raised when he appears. In this way he will judge both the living and the dead. The wicked will be cast into eternal torment, while Jesus' believing saints will be transformed into his perfect image and taken up into the new creation. This is what Scripture promises will happen on the Last Day.

We've come now to the "end times" part of the church year. It doesn't get its own special season. But the last few weeks of the church year always have to do with the end times. It's

kind of like a special little season within the Pentecost season. It makes a nice transition into Advent too, which marks the beginning of the new church year, because Advent also has a lot to do with the end times. So for a few weeks here we're going to talk about *the end of the world*.

I've often found that if you want someone to pay attention, all you have to do is talk about the end of the world. Even if everyone thinks you're crazy, they'll at least listen to you and then dismiss you instead of just ignoring you. Try this sometime. When you're walking down the sidewalk, instead of just saying, "Hi," or, "Good morning," to strangers as they pass, try saying, "The world is coming to an end," and see how they react. They'll probably think you're crazy, but they'll definitely notice you. There's something intriguing about the end of the world.

And I suppose this is both good and bad. On the good side, we want people to pay attention to Jesus' warnings and come to repentance before the day of grace ends. On the bad side, there's a whole bunch of speculation that just gets way too much attention.

There are some Scripture passages on the end times that are mysterious and somewhat difficult to understand. We should do our best to understand these passages. But, what often happens, is that someone gets so engrossed trying to figure out the difficult passages, that they lose sight of the simple and clear passages. Sometimes they even come up with theories that are completely contradictory to the clear passages. So whenever we deal with the end times, we want to remind ourselves of the basic biblical truths. And the best tool we have for this is the creeds.

Now the creeds are not Scripture. You can't look them up in the Bible, but they are very, very biblical. What I mean is, everything in them is straight out of the Bible, and they summarize the basic teachings of the Bible in a very simple way. Their summaries of the end times are especially helpful, because they keep it simple.

Most Sundays we use the Apostles' Creed, which has a very simple explanation of the Last Day. We confess that "[Jesus] is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty," which, by the way, is exactly what we read from Hebrews this morning (10:12). That's a good example of how the content of the creeds comes straight out of the Bible. "[He] is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from where He shall come to judge the living and the dead." And then in the next paragraph we confess, "I believe in ... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." And this is exactly what we read from the prophet Daniel this morning: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (12:2).

On communion Sundays we use the Nicene Creed, which is also very similar. We confess that "[Jesus] shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end." And then at the end we confess, "I look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."

So there are four basic biblical truths concerning the Last Day that we confess in both of these creeds. First, that Jesus is coming again. Second, that he will raise the dead—both the righteous and the unrighteous. Third, that he will judge both the living and the dead. And fourth, that he will grant eternal life to all who believe in him. Jesus is coming again. He will raise the dead. He will judge the living and the dead. And he will grant eternal life to all who believe in him.

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When we keep these basic biblical truths front and center, we realize that the Bible's end times teaching really isn't that complicated. It's actually quite simple. It's when we start to speculate about all the mysteries that we tie our brains in knots. When we start to speculate about when it will happen and what all the signs mean, it can become very confusing.

The answer to the "when?" question is *we don't know*. Jesus says, "**Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father**" (13:32). It's futile to try to figure out the when. Instead, we must be ready at all times.

The disciples also asked Jesus what the signs would be, and he did tell them. He spoke of wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, and, especially, persecutions. Basically, any bad thing that happens is a sign of the end. We could try to match certain wars or certain natural disasters to the signs the Bible talks about. But it's an exercise in futility. It's just speculation. And that's not the purpose for which God reveals the signs to us. We're not supposed to look at the Bible and then the newspaper and say, "Oh, well, the last two thousand years weren't really close to the end, but now I think we are; it should be within the next seven years." That's not the purpose of the signs. The purpose of the signs is to remind us that we are *always* close to the end. In 64 AD, when Emperor Nero was burning Christians alive, they believed they were close to the end, and they were right. When the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the Christians believed they were close to the end, and they were right. When World War I broke out in 1914, Christians believed they were close to the end, and they were right. Every war, every earthquake, every famine, every persecution, every disaster, and every tragedy is a reminder to us that the end is near. It has to be, because God is gracious, and he will not allow the evil in this world to persist forever. Every evil we encounter is a reminder that the world is broken, and it can't stay this way.

So when we hear of wars, we think, *Right; this is not the way the world is supposed to be, and God will not allow it to remain this way*. And when we hear earthquakes, and famines, and tornadoes, and fires that destroy half of California, we think, *Oh, yeah, God won't let this go on forever*.

There is a limit to how much evil God will allow. I don't know what it is. You don't know what it is. Even if we did know, we wouldn't be able to quantify it. But God knows. For now God permits this evil world to continue, because it means repentance is still open. More people can hear the Gospel and trust in Jesus for salvation. This is the will of God: "That all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). This is why Jesus has not yet returned. So we call this era that we live in the "day of grace." But at some point God will say, "Enough is enough," and the day of grace will end. The evil has to stop sometime, and this, of course, is good. So really, every evil we see and experience is a sign of the end, because it reminds us that this world is not supposed to be this way, and God will not allow it to continue. So in a sort of ironic way, the evil we encounter in life should really encourage us, because it reminds us that Jesus is coming again, and he is coming soon.

So Jesus tells his disciples about wars, natural disasters, and persecutions. In this text he spends most of the time talking about persecutions. And the disciples all experienced this first hand. They were arrested and beaten by their own countrymen. That is, by the councils and synagogues. And some of them stood before governors and kings, which was really quite an

opportunity. Even though they were on trial, this was an opportunity to testify of the grace of God in Jesus Christ in the halls of the most powerful men on the planet.

Now this would make me kind of nervous. What would you say to kings, especially if you're standing there in chains? But Jesus knows this would make a person nervous, so he accompanies it with a promise. He says to these disciples, **"Do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit"** (13:11). God, of course, wants the Gospel to be proclaimed clearly and effectively, so he promises to give his disciples the words. This is excellent.

But sometimes this verse has been taken out of context and misapplied very badly. I've actually heard this done before, where it's applied to all circumstances of evangelism. And the message is basically, *Don't worry if you don't know any doctrine; just get out there and share the good news. The Holy Spirit will tell you what to say.* But Jesus wasn't talking about all circumstances of evangelism. He was talking about when his disciples would be persecuted and stand trial before kings. It might be possible to apply it to other Christians who are persecuted, but it's way too much of a stretch to apply it to all circumstances of evangelism.

If you want to tell people about Jesus, and you should, you need to know something about him. Now I'm not saying you need to have a Ph.D. in order to share the gospel. Saying something is almost always better than saying nothing. But knowing what to say is a whole lot better than not knowing what to say. The promise Jesus made to his disciples really doesn't apply to the conversation you have with your neighbor across the fence. It actually helps to know some doctrine.

Doctrine is not optional for Christians. And doctrine is simply the biblical teaching of who God is, what he has done, and what he continues to do. And I actually think that every Christian likes doctrine. You may not like reading big dusty systematic theology books, where all the important words are in Latin, German, Hebrew, or Greek. I wish you all did, but the reality is you don't. But you still like doctrine, and you know it's important. If someone asks you, "Who is Jesus?" that's a doctrinal question, and I think you would all agree that the answer is important. And if someone asks you, "What do you believe?" that's a doctrinal question, and it's important to be able to answer in the most biblical way possible.

It's also important to know doctrine so that we might endure to the end and be saved. Notice, the first thing Jesus says when the disciples ask him for signs of the end is, **"See that no one leads you astray"** (13:5). One of the signs of the end of the age is false teachers. And this shouldn't really surprise us, because false teaching is very, very evil. Jesus says, **"Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!'"** And here's the really scary part: **"And they will lead many astray."** (13:6) Did you hear that? Many Christians—children of God—will be led astray by false teachers. This is worse than being persecuted. Losing your faith is much worse than having to die for it. If you die for your faith in Jesus Christ, you will be saved for eternity. If you lose your faith, you will perish for eternity, even if losing that faith simply means following someone you *think* is a faithful teacher of God, but really isn't. If they lead you astray to worship a false Christ, that false Christ cannot save you. This is part of the reason why it is so important for all Christians to study and learn biblical Christian doctrine. The knowledge of Christ really is a matter of life and death, because the true Christ is the only Christ who can save.

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When Jesus returns, he will judge all mankind. How will you and I fair on that day? Will it be a day of condemnation or a day of salvation? The evil in this world is not confined to all the stuff around us. It is in our own hearts, and it comes out in our actions in some very disturbing ways. Consider yourself in light of the Ten Commandments. This should be part of our preparation for worship. Have I trusted in other things above the one true God? Have I used God's name in a meaningless or false way? Have I neglected his Word or been absent at worship? Have I disrespected my parents? How about my other neighbors? Have I spoken harshly to them or done some kind of bodily harm to them? Have I thought of or committed some form of adultery? Have I stolen something or gotten something unfairly? Have I been false in my words? Have I spread gossip or some other kind of speech intended to harm a person? Have I simply desired something or someone that God has not given me? This is idolatry. These and many other sins make us guilty before God. So how will it go when the angels separate the wicked from the righteous?

If we are judged according to these sins, we will be numbered with the wicked. But if we are judged according to Christ's sacrifice for us, we will be numbered with the righteous.

This is what we read about in Hebrews this morning. It compares Jesus with the priests who would offer sacrifices in the temple:

Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Heb. 10:11-14)

And in the gospel lesson, Jesus and his disciples are sitting on a hill, looking across the valley at the temple. The disciples were impressed by the glory of this temple, but Jesus said it would be destroyed (13:2). It must have been shocking and disturbing to the disciples. This was the center of their worship. This is where the priests offered sacrifices every day to take away their sins. What would happen to them when this stops? Could they still be forgiven? But those sacrifices never took away a single sin—not even one. They all looked forward to the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus that takes away every sin. The temple was good, but it would soon become obsolete. Within three days of this conversation, Jesus would be hanging on a cross. In contrast to the beauty of the temple, the sight of Jesus must have been hideous. But, considering the ugliness of our sin, the image of the cross was much more appropriate. The blood of God was spilled there to purify our wicked hearts.

When "He shall come to judge the living and the dead," this blood is our only hope and confidence. Faith in this sacrifice transforms that day of condemnation into the Day of Salvation. It is the day when evil will finally come to an end.

Dear saints, as you see this world go from bad to worse, do not fear. It means "your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). The victory Christ accomplished over sin, death, and the devil is about to be realized in every fiber of our being. For just as he was raised from the dead and glorified forever, so will his believing saints. Even if your body fails before that glorious day, and you are laid in the dust of the earth, Christ will awaken you from death, and you won't miss a thing. You shall be raised, and we will all be transformed into the spotless

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image of God. Until that day, there will be hardship. **“But the one who endures to the end will be saved”** (13:13). Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, **“Surely I am coming soon.”** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)