

Sermon on Mark 13:24-27
Pastor David Wietzke
3rd Sunday of End Times: Saints Triumphant (B)
November 18, 2018



*"But in those days, following that distress,
'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'
"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds, with great power and glory.
And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth
to the ends of the heavens."
(Mark 13:24-27)*

Scientist Carl Sagan began his 1980 book *Cosmos* with this famous opening line: "The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be."

While Sagan was a famous scientist, there's nothing scientific about that statement at all. It's a statement of his faith—a faith in atheism, a faith that nothing other than the observed universe can ever exist. But how can that ever be proven? Not only that, but observing the universe can't tell us how it came to be. It can't tell us if there was anything before it or anything after it.

Jesus Christ had something very different to say. He talks about the end of the "cosmos", the destruction of the very heavenly bodies, not by natural processes but by an act of God. But he also talks about the future—what will happen AFTER the destruction of the heavenly bodies. And what a future it is! That's what we celebrate on this Sunday we call "Saints Triumphant." In his Word today **JESUS PREDICTS THE END--AND THE NEW BEGINNING.**

I. Jesus' words describe the end of this created world

In our Bible classes on Sundays we have been looking at Genesis chapter 1 and the story of creation. The size of the heavenly bodies, the stars and galaxies is almost incomprehensible. Yet as the little kids sing, "The Lord God made them all." The world has not been around forever, it is designed by the hand of God—as its own incredible wonders make clear. And the God who designed it in all its beauty and wisdom is the same one who will call it to an end.

***"But in those days, following that distress,
'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'***

The earlier "distress" are the signs of the end that Jesus had warned about earlier in this chapter. Starting with the destruction of Jerusalem, and all through the centuries that would follow: persecution of believers, false prophets and deceivers. But Jesus said, "For the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, God has shortened [these days]"—because if he didn't do that nobody's faith would survive.

So God steps in. And what does that look like? It looks like creation in reverse. The sun and moon were set up to give light; its light will go dark. The heavenly bodies were set in place to be a reliable markers for seasons, days, and years; now they will be shaken from their appointed paths. Only God could establish them and only God can take them away!

Sometimes when people are going through a hard time, their friends will encourage them by saying, "The sun's still going to rise tomorrow morning." In other words, there's always a new day. Maybe tomorrow will be better than today was. Maybe things will change.

In some ways that advice is good advice and encouragement. But these verses remind us that it has its limits. Because there isn't always another day. In our own lives our number of days on earth is limited. It will have an end. And Jesus reminds us that there will be a day when the sun no longer shines. This world also has its appointed end. God has set that day, and today it's one day closer than it was yesterday.

How can you prepare for that? How can you be ready to see the sun go dark and the stars fall? People these days like to prep for human disasters. Get your rain barrel set up, bury a fuel tank, set up solar power for your house, grow your own food in case society collapses. But no human preparation can help us "ride out" this storm, the end of the age. If God is coming with power to end the world, our only refuge is in God himself. If God is coming to shorten the days of suffering of his people and punish those who tempt and oppressed them, then it is of paramount importance that you be one of his people and not one of the oppressors and tempters!

II. Jesus speaks of a new beginning

For he says, ***"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds, with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."***

Jesus acts not only to end the world. He comes to gather his people. Notice that he says that when he comes they will be all over the world, in every corner under heaven. This is in line with other things he says in predicting the end. "The Gospel must first be preached in the whole world. And then the end will come." (cf. Matthew 24:14)

But who are these people? Jesus calls them "the elect", in other words, the ones that he has chosen. This is the way the Bible speaks--and it does it in many places--to emphasize that salvation is completely the work of God. "You did not choose me, I chose you," Jesus told his disciples the night before he died. (John 15:16)

But how can I know if I am among the elect? How can I know if I am one that Jesus has chosen? Again the Bible's message is crystal clear. Instead of trying to peer into the mind of God, it says over and over again: believe in Jesus Christ! He is the one God sent to save you!

Listen to him! Trust him! Follow his Word instead of ignoring it! Don't resist the Holy Spirit that God sent into your heart through that Word, but welcome the chance to hear and deeply take to heart everything that he says to you! Find the assurance that God wants you in heaven in the fact that his Son sacrificed his life and suffered to pay off your debt of sin and guilt before God!

And then what? Jesus doesn't say it here. He just says that he, the Son of Man, will gather them. But gather them for what? You heard the prophet Daniel talk about it in our other lesson today. He called it "everlasting life." He said, "*Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*"

We call this Sunday "Saints Triumphant" to remind us of this incredible truth. The first part that we celebrate is that Jesus is already gathering the souls of his people to glory. There are already saints triumphant because they have reached glory with Jesus! St. Paul often wrote about how much he longed for that day. "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" than remaining in the body on earth (Php 1:23). He said, "I prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:8) In several places the book of Revelation portrays the souls even of martyred Christians safely in heaven with their Savior.

So on this day we first of praise God for those triumphant saints. We praise him that our loved ones in Christ are in paradise by grace, safe from all harm to body or soul. We praise him that we don't have to fear death but that it is the way to paradise, as Jesus reassured that criminal next to him on the cross.

But we also look forward to something even greater. The day that Jesus gathers his elect from all the earth. The day he raises the dead and glorifies his people. The stars may fall, but Daniel reminded us that Jesus' people will shine like stars forever and ever. The day that the book of Revelation speaks about at great length: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them...He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Rev. 21:1-4)

Jesus clearly speaks about an end. But it's not just an end. It's a beginning! It's the beginning of a whole different world, a new life that we will enjoy (and that's an understatement). This world's history goes on for a reason. It's a chance for us to praise Jesus in a sinful world. It's a chance for more sinners to be born so that they can be baptized in Jesus' name, can hear his Word, can come to faith and be saved, because that number of his elect whose places are being prepared has not yet been reached. But this world is not the be-all and end-all. It has an end date. And God's future world will be so great that his prophet could say of life now, "The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." (Isaiah 65:17)

Conclusion

The shoe and athletic company Reebok used to have the slogan: "Life is short. Play hard."

They got the first part right at least. Life is short. Eternity, on the other hand is not. The end is coming--but also the beginning. What does this mean for your life right now? It means: always be ready. Always put Jesus first. Always come to him with all your sins and all your needs, and trust in his death. Always repent and always rejoice.

And maybe not "play hard" but be focused on doing what is right and the tasks Jesus gives you. He is coming soon. He will gather you home. Until then--make it your goal, your absolute passion to be honoring his name! Amen.