

Mark 13:24-37

Last week we heard the “beginning of the end” from Jesus. The signs corresponding to the destruction of the temple that would happen in 70ad under General Titus. We also heard him use these events as encouragement for us to be ready. We took comfort in the reality that if you are in Christ, well, then you are ready whether you know it or feel it or not. If you are his child he will take care of you, you will be just fine even if through a valley of tribulation and death.

Furthermore, we found instruction as to where we might find our courage while we wait, and where we might find assurance that we with our sins and fears are God’s children who will be saved – we find this courage and assurance in God’s gifts and promises that have come to us, which are not accidents – not at all.

I confess our themes today are similar as Jesus speaks about the end. I do have a few textual notes we might explore, however. Lest you get away with a really short sermon – we wouldn’t want that would we?

We see the text begins with a time referent, “After that tribulation.” Which tribulation? Well THAT one, as in, the one he was just talking about – the destruction of the temple and that siege of Jerusalem. And so textually we are drawn not to some great tribulation right before the end (that we now have to search the newspaper headlines for to see if it’s now or not), but back to the great tribulation Jesus just described with the temple and it’s accompanying signs seen in the first century. Jesus notes that after *that* the Son of Man will come and bring the end.

Now, I get it, the timeline might seem like a stretch here 2000 years later, but it does fit. The end will surely come *after* those events. And if that seems cheesy, well consider the text again, “Truly I say to you this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” Which would

mean then that even Christ's hearers back then could not say, "I don't have to watch, I don't have to be ready, that's for others to worry about generations later."

No. Even from that generation readiness was expected. Why? Is Jesus being sneaky? Does he know it will take a hundred generations but he doesn't want to tell them that because then they will be too apathetic? No, Jesus is not a sneak.

And as we all know, even if it takes another thousand years (which is just another day to God right?), even if it takes another thousand years for the Son of Man to come on the clouds, that certainly doesn't mean it will be a thousand years before you meet him face to face. We will stand before the King, just as that first generation of eyewitnesses did, so his word says: keep awake, be ready.

Furthermore, this seemingly stretched timeline (2000 years!) - can we again not see this as a function of God's mercy? The text says when these signs have been fulfilled he is at the very gates! Right there! Right there! ... Well, what's he doing right there for two thousand years, why won't he come in?

Is this again, just a trick, just some clever words? Or, or is he actually right there, right there! At the gates, holding them open as saints stream in out of tribulation. In that generation, in ours, and in each in between. Folks, Jesus is at the gates, he holds them open that more might join the feast in his kingdom. And yes, one day, the Father will order that gate shut in his time, but why should he shut in when the lambs he loves are coming in?

Now a cynic might ask, "well, he's waiting to save some, sure - but at what cost? So many others aren't coming in, and are dying! Isn't he, by waiting, multiplying pain not joy?" I might respond, well, is life not a gift? And sure, yes, we break it, but then is not his invitation to come

through his gates to life, is that invitation not for all? For the world? It is! And so he stands calling! And even more in his last illustration today we see the Church, y'all, are the doorkeepers. Do we not stand at the gate to call! To snatch out of the fire as Jude says? Is not the Church, as depicted in the new Jerusalem in Revelation, is the Church not depicted as the gates of the city? And so we see God's heart, he waits because each life is that precious, he waits because it is worth it to him for his people to be saved, he waits because his invitation is for all.

When will it shut? When there are no more left to call, when no one else wants to come in? Maybe. But do we then use that as an excuse to take a brief rest? Or try to add up the numbers and figure it out? We must go back to Jesus' words today. Those things are not our call or paygrade. Our call is to be watchful, to stand at the gates and call out to a dying world where our Hope lies.

And if you think, "How can I do that? I'm just as scared of the wars, rumors of wars, sins, and falling stars and earthquakes and famines as the next person – how can I stand fast, let alone be a doorkeeper?" Or maybe that isn't you, maybe you are the opposite, maybe you struggle to see the urgency at all – maybe because things are going well for you right now, maybe because you're tired and don't see the point, maybe because you are fighting some apathy. Either way, I invite you back to the text. In a text with so much shifting, timelines, signs, and so on, there is in here something solid. With all these things happening or passing away, somewhat literally, there is something solid, something sure, something that does *not* pass away. "My Words will not pass away," Jesus promises.

And so this is where we must plant ourselves. Here is where we must stand in a shaking and apathetic world. With shaking and apathetic hearts. We must remain in his word. It will challenge us to fight against our apathy, it will encourage us to fight against our fears.

Here, in His Word, is something you can cling to, something you can trust. And we know this because we see it in the first century, in that very generation. We see, in his death on the cross, the sky goes dark. We see the earth quaking. We see tribulation and suffering from whips, nails, and spear. And this suffering is unjust, he didn't deserve it, we did. It is divine as he suffers for the sins of the world. And we see death. And there, when Jesus' ministry and mission seemed so fleeting, and gone after three years to never matter again. The Word of the Word made flesh comes true: "After three days I will rise again." And more earthquakes and more signs that herald this is the Son of Man to come on the clouds just as he ascended. This is the One in whom we find our rock and foundation in shaky and turbulent times.

His Word will not fade away, and his word has said that he has and will overcome all things, his word has said he will save all of his people out of any tribulation and generation, his word has said that you are his people, who have received his word, his gifts. His word has said that he has died for you to forgive. His word has said he will see you safely through it all to his kingdom. A kingdom that will not pass away and will make all things new.

He is at the gates, he works to save, and his words do not pass away. These are all reasons for courage, vigilance, and hope even today.

God be praised. Amen.