

2024 Mark 13:1-13

It was a may night in South Dakota and I had a nine months pregnant wife. But not to worry, we had two kids already - this was old-hat. Her contractions started but I was a seasoned father, and knew what sort of pain and struggle to see in her before I really needed to worry. Perhaps a few hours go by and she says “she might be ready to go to the hospital, just in case.” But “no,” I say, “she labored hours and hours with the others and the books said she’d be more comfortable at home.” “Go rest,” I say. “Take a hot shower. Nothing to worry about.”

Well then the water breaks. “Hmm,” I think, a bit worried, “Maybe this one is coming a little faster than the last two. Uh oh.” So this genius dad calls the babysitter who has to drive in from the country. And I begin assembling the bags and loading up the car for the, that’s right, 50 minute! - drive to the hospital.

Isaiah was not born on the side of the road, thank you very much. We had a comfortable 45 minutes at the hospital before he was born.

But yes, you better believe I was sweating the whole drive up.

Because I had ignored the signs and wasn’t ready.

Jesus in the discourse today doesn’t actually talk about the end of the world much at all. He talks about the destruction of the temple in 70ad under General Titus. It’s there in the text, notice what the disciples ask about – the buildings of Jerusalem. The stones! This prompts Jesus to prophecy then that they will not be left standing. Fulfilled, as I mentioned, in 70 ad. Josephus gives a harrowing account of the siege, and how Titus wanted desperately to save the city, but, perhaps it was destiny, or prophecy, that the city is burned from within, from without and torn down.

But, back to our text, the disciples then ask “What will be the sign when all *these things* are about to be accomplished?” What things? The things they were just talking about – the stones and the buildings coming down!

And so Jesus’ response then is about that time, not specifically the *end* time.

If you still don’t believe me, look at the end of verse 7 when he says, “do not be alarmed, this must take place, but the end is *not* yet.” Or the end of verse 8, “These are but the *beginning* of the birth pains.”

And so the seasoned father in me wants to say, “nothing to see here, go rest a little, this isn’t about the end of the world it’s just a few contractions.” But then did I learn nothing from that nervous drive in South Dakota?

Yes, Jesus is talking about the destruction of the temple in 70ad, but why does that mean this text isn’t the perfect text to teach us to be alert, and to be ready? Jesus doesn’t want you sweating, wondering if you are going to be OK, or be saved. So notice the birth pains, be ready.

Which is probably why in about 10 verses Jesus will use the destruction of the temple to transition quite seamlessly into his teaching to the last day. Where the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven.

Which means this text is an invitation for us to be ready. The birth pangs have started the time is now, the day is today, to be ready.

How?

Well, first a bit of comfort – You who are baptized in Jesus name, who confess his name, who cling to his gifts and promises in faith: you are ready already. A price has been paid to your account.

And so you are his child. He will never leave or forsake you. Salvation is yours. Which means your city can be ransacked like Jerusalem was. You could get hit by a car, you could get the worst diagnosis imaginable and God will be faithful to deliver you to his Kingdom even if through that. You're ready, because you belong to him.

But sometimes we doubt that don't we? And it's one thing for me to stand here and say, "yes you will be just fine if you were in a 6 month siege starving to death," when I have never been starving.

Which is why Jesus gives this teaching. Because he knows it will be hard at times.

It may not seem like it at first, I admit. You read Jesus discourse on the "beginning of the end," if I can call it that, and it seems like he is saying, "Here are a dozen terrifying things that are going to happen to you... so don't worry!" What!? Jesus? You just gave us like a dozen reasons to worry! Does he have no self awareness, can he not read the room?

Or... Or... does he know perfectly well that these are terrible things and wants you to know that, for all who are ready, for all his people, they truly do not have to worry. He knows how bad it is, and he will save in spite of it and through it!

And he does know how bad it is, doesn't he? Does he know hunger? Fasting 40 days. Does he know what its like to be ridiculed by family? As they sat outside thinking he was insane. Does he know what betrayal and loss and pain are like? Does he know a thing or two about being dragged

in front of earthly rulers? We think of King Herod and Pontius Pilate. Does he know of suffering and death?

Yes.

He will go through this, for his people, for you. To wash you clean, to make you his own, that you might be ready. So that whatever cross and for whatever reason it is laid on you – you might know you will be okay. Salvation is yours in Jesus.

So can we trust that our Lord does not say these things flippantly? Can we draw near to him in time of worry, and in so doing be watchful, discerning, and ready?

Can we see that this is not an invitation to get the calculators out and try and predict when he will come back, but instead see it as the pangs and contractions that invite us to be vigilant? Can we see that if it seems like he is taking a long time... that, well he does that so more and more might be in his Kingdom? So can we be a people who wait and watch faithfully?

What does that look like: Consider the Word of God and it's encouragement. The armor of God, the promises and gifts of God that come to us – use them, or rather, receive them! Consider the martyrs and apostles who have ran this race before us, what kept them faithful? Here's something: Hebrews 10:19-25. Therefore, brothers,[c] since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up

one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

How’s that sound for being ready? For being brave? For being watchful and vigilant?

And perhaps we think, that’s well and good for them, but I’m no martyr or apostle, so where does that leave me who looks at the news and my sin as is so worried!?

Well I’d like to think it leaves you right where you should be, here at the foot of the cross. Here where the water and the bread and wine are. I think it leaves you united with the One who has gone through the brokenness, gone through death, and overcome it. Yes, this leaves you, yes you with your doubts and fears and sins in the hands of a strong Savior who will save you even if you are terrified and sweating bullets. Because your courage (or lack thereof) doesn’t save you – He does! The irony of course is that this truth – that he saves you no matter how afraid you are – well, that truth might just give you something like courage.

I pray we all might face wars and rumors of wars and slander and persecution and sickness and death with fearless defiance and faith to move mountains. I do. The Lord wants that for us too, which is why he encourages us to receive gifts to strengthen our faith. But take heart – even when we are weak and timid and grasping to mustard seeds, he is still strong, he is still faithful, and he will still save. May that Good News in His Work and promise make you ready and give you courage as you see the birth pans of creation. Look to Christ, Stand fast, you will be saved by his grace and power. Amen.