

Sermon Draft

Text: Mark 13:24–37

Sermon: “Be Ready, Be Excited, Be Steadfast”

On this the Last Sunday of the Church Year, we are reminded of the end of all things, for we will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds (Mark 13:26). Jesus’ purpose in these end times is to ***“gather his elect”*** (13:27) and to announce the deliverance of God’s elect. As this, the day of his appearing, draws near, we are to ***“be on guard”*** and ***“keep awake”*** (13:33). 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 the salvation of the Lord will last “forever” and his “righteousness will never be dismayed”*** (Isaiah 51:6). So, ***“keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life”*** (Jude 21).

The Bible makes clear that Jesus Christ is coming again to gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The one who created the world, who redeemed and restored the world by his death and resurrection, is coming back, as we confess in the creeds, to judge the living and the dead in perfect justice.

It's been two thousand years since Jesus promised to return. That makes it seem highly unlikely to people today, including churchgoing Christians. But our text gives a very vivid picture. Jesus promises to return in visible glory and with great power.

When he returns, all will know that Jesus of Nazareth, the one who lived two thousand years ago, died on the cross, was buried, and rose again. He is Lord over all, the very Son of God, the Messiah. He was made incarnate, carried out a public three-year ministry, was crucified to pay for our sin, was bodily raised from the dead, exalted over all things, and, yes, one day will return for all to see. That's our focus on this Last Sunday, and it's an intriguing topic. The promise of Jesus' second coming allures and assures us.

In our text, Jesus puts it all into perspective. The created world is temporary. Its days, like our own, are numbered. Everywhere we look, we get reminders that this world is temporary. Gray hairs, weak knees, muscle pulls, bones creaking. Machines break. Toys fall apart. The computer locks up. Sometimes we wonder if we'll ever make it through the day.

Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem for what would be our Lord's last Passover. In the verses before our text, as they left the temple, the disciples looked around admiring its grandeur. The temple was a beautiful and magnificent architectural achievement. The Jews took great pride in it. It stood as the central place of worship for Jews to bring their sacrifices and offer prayers to God. Here God made his dwelling with his people.

Jesus took this opportunity to teach his disciples about the end times. He made the disturbing comment that in the not-too-distant future not one of those buildings would be intact and not one of the giant stones would be on top of another.

The disciples were naturally upset about that, so they asked when that would happen. Jesus then told them about the destruction of Jerusalem, and he took this teachable moment a step further. He pointed the disciples ahead to the times that would precede the Last Day.

The end of the world always has a certain allure for us, and Jesus' disciples respond in a very understandable way. They want to know when: When is all this going to take place? That's still what seems to fascinate people most about the end times. Why have Judgment Day and the end of the world as we know it always been such attention-grabbers?

To the world, they represent dramatic action and a cataclysmic battle between good and evil that simply must be seen (and of course, scripted into a multimillion-dollar book series or movie). To believers, Judgment Day and the end of the world are the fulfillment of the promises of God centered in Jesus, the joyful end when we finally fall into the arms of a waiting Savior, who won the victory over sin, Satan, and death.

To both a world that thirsts to be entertained and believers who hunger to spend eternity with God, Judgment Day and the end of the world seem so far into the future and so foggy with unclear interpretation that any little detail is as valuable as a road sign when you're lost. There are some things about Judgment Day we know. In a flash, all people will be gathered before Jesus, including those who have died, their bodies raised to rejoin their souls. But there are some things about Judgment Day we don't know, especially when it will occur.

Throughout history, there have been a whole host of folks who have predicted when the end of the world would take place. But the fact is that these folks have been totally and terribly wrong in their predictions. What does Jesus say? He tells us, "Don't believe them." The way he puts it is: "***But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven***" (v 32). While we don't know when the Last Day will come, Jesus does give us some insight.

We know we must always be on the alert for Jesus' return, for he continues, "Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 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" (vs. 33–34).

Jesus wants us to be alert, on guard, to keep watching for him to come at any time. Jesus underscores this with the illustration of a man who leaves home and places his servants in charge while he's away. Jesus is the "man," the Church is the "house," and we believers are the "servants." The first point Jesus makes with this picture is that we in the Church are to "*be on guard,*" as he says—for his return at any moment.

The first-century Christians believed Jesus would return in their lifetime. They lived in that hope and expectation. They kept waiting and watching and longing for his appearing.

The message to us today in this twenty-first century is the same as it was to those in the first century: we don't know when he will return, so always keep ready. Jesus says in Luke 21:34: ***“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”***

The Lord Jesus told his followers what they could understand, and he does the same to us. For us Christians, life is full of trouble every day precisely because we are Christians. But we can understand this too: ***“The one who endures to the end will be saved”*** (Matthew 24:13). We do not walk on this troubled road alone. Jesus walks with us as we watch and wait. The Holy Spirit will empower his redeemed to make a witness before those who hate and persecute them; they will be given words of proclamation for those who persecute and punish them, murder and martyr them. You can endure to the end because Jesus lived, died, and rose for you.

Are we paying attention to the signs of the last days? Are we going along with the current, or fighting the good fight of faith? In the Epistle this day, Jude directs us to be built up in our most holy faith, keeping ourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

Christ is coming! And when he does, we will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. In the end, it's all about Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega (the Beginning and the End). For ***“no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”*** (1 Corinthians 2:9).

For those in faith, we who trust in Jesus Christ alone, this is not terrifying but wonderfully assuring. We can await his coming with joy—for, he assures us, he comes with life, with light, with forgiveness and hope, and he comes to put sin and death in their eternal places, once and for all.

Be built up, assured by his words! And stay ready for the Day of the Lord by undergirding your life with those words of the Lord. Our Lord Jesus has daily comfort, daily promises, daily gifts and blessings to pour into our lives as he cares for us with his Word and Sacraments and calls us to a new and glorious life with him. *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”* (v 31).

The Word of the Lord endures forever so that we can endure until the end. So, put on the armor of God. As we have been forgiven, so we forgive. As we are loved by God, so we share that love with others. As he serves and cares for us, so we serve and care for others. As we have received the Good News of salvation in Christ, so we share it with others that they, too, may know him and be with their Savior in the mansions he has prepared in heaven. As we are comforted, let us bestow that comfort. Live as believers who already belong to eternal life. And this is eternal life, that we know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent (see John 17:3).

The Day of the Lord is coming. The signs are all around us. We're living in the last days. It won't be easy for you as a believer. But don't be afraid. Christ will soon come again in righteous judgment to take us and all believers in him to be with him at his side. Until then, he's at our side.

His coming may be sudden, but its certainty calls us to a life of joyful expectation. Be assured by his coming! Live as believers who long for the day of his appearing. Pray that day will be here sooner rather than later, the day when there will be no more headaches and heartaches, fears and tears, troubles or trials, strife and sorrow, just God's grace in fullest measure, eternal life. The Lord's desire for us is that his return would not be a day of terror, but triumph in him.

The one who is coming has come so that we might live. The babe of Bethlehem became the Good Friday Savior and the Easter hope for the whole world. As Christians, we live in him now by faith, and on that Last Day we will be with him forever in love! That's good news for us and for all who believe.

With faith in Christ, there is forgiveness for all of our sins. There is hope when things seem hopeless. There is life after death. There is eternity. With Jesus, we are more than conquerors. That's why Jesus lived, died, and rose for us. So, not just allured—stay alert, be assured. Jesus is coming!

“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, 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” (Jude 24–25).