

The King is Coming

Mark 13:21-27

***What keeps a worn out wineskin whole,
Or unpatched, threadbare garment's seams
From shredding? Who maintains the soul
Of even those whose darkness deems***

***Rebellion wise and who resist
The power of the great I AM?
The One in whom all things consist
Is still the God of Abraham.***

***He is the One who lights the night,
And galaxies obey His rule.
He even holds by His great might
Each microscopic molecule.***

***So I'll not fret with frantic fears.
Like those who build on sifting sand.
Beset by blasphemy and biers,
I know El Elyon holds my hand.***

The disciples had climbed the Mount of Olives with Jesus many times during the three years they followed Him. But this walk was like no other. This was the last time they would walk with Jesus.

On top of the hill, the little knot of men paused. Then the Redeemer rose up into the air.

The disciples watched until the Lord was lost in the clouds overhead. Stunned and shocked, they continued to stare up at the sky.

And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Acts 1:10-11

After the angels spoke to them, the disciples didn't stay on the Mount of Olives staring up into the cloudy sky. But that doesn't mean they didn't long for the Redeemer to return.

Writing to one of his young proteges, Paul said Christians ought to look for the return of the Lord who loves us and gave His life to buy us from the slave market of sin. It is our blessed hope.

...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us... Titus 2:13-14

Seated on the very same spot from which He would one day rise up into the air, the Savior spoke to His disciples about the time when He will return.

And His words sound a note of both warning and hope for believers of all ages.

Deception

Again and again, Jesus sounded the same alarm. Those who trust in Him are commanded to be wise and wary of fakers and frauds who claim to be Christ returned.

When such servants of Satan come, we who trust in Jesus shouldn't be taken by surprise. We are to be more than merely skeptical of them. We are to be impossible to persuade.

And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; Verse 21

Jesus knew how His followers' hearts would ache and long for the days when they walked by His side.

He also knew that yearning would make them vulnerable to deception. So His warning was highly specific.

The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. They will say to you, 'Look there! Look here!' Do not go away, and do not run after them. Luke 17:22-23

...if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Matthew 24:26-27

False Christs are heralded with whispers and sly, secretive calls to go out to the desert or into an inner chamber to meet the Master.

Those frauds and fakers will be heralded in much the same way Andrew called Peter. He found His brother and urged him to come to the banks of the Jordan and meet the Messiah.

That is the way it was when the Master was here on earth the first time. Announcements of His presence were personal and private.

But His second coming will neither secretive nor selective. It will be public. His coming will be so sudden and startling, there will be no mistaking Him. Every eye will see Him split the skies.

False Christs also pattern themselves after our Lord's first advent in other ways. When Jesus walked the dusty donkey trails of Galilee and the cobbled side streets of Jerusalem, He worked wonders, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind and life to the dead. So that is what false teachers will also do.

...for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance. Verses 22-23

It is important to notice that our Redeemer didn't say charlatans will perform fake wonders and produce false signs. They will indeed perform startling miracles. Not by God's power but by Satan's.

So Christians must never be drawn to self-promoting prophets merely because they seem to possess the power to work wonders.

Our God does indeed perform wonderful miracles in the lives of those who come to Him. But miracles alone are never proof that any man has been called and commissioned by God.

No matter who the person is or how miraculous his miracles seem to be, we must weigh

the words he speaks and the message he proclaims. And if the Gospel a teacher proclaims is not true to God's Word, we must turn away and refuse to follow.

False teachers greatly err when they labor to imitate the Master's first visit to this planet. When our Lord returns, there isn't the slightest hint in God's Word that He will heal even one sick person or give sight to one blind man.

In that hour, the time for healing hearts, delivering demoniacs and mending broken bodies will be finished.

Distress

Many years after Peter stood on the Mount of Olives and heard angels promise that Jesus will return, the old missionary wrote about Christ's return and the scoffers who laugh at the very idea of it.

...in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." 2 Peter 3:3-4

It is familiar argument. Human beings have lived and died for uncounted millennia, some men say. And nothing has changed.

Seasons still roll on. Winter blossoms into spring. And summer fades into fall.

Chariots and ox carts have given way to automobiles and airplanes. Yet the earth still rotates once each twenty-four hours and travels around the sun each year. And the stars haven't moved since Egyptians and Aztecs marked their places.

Nothing on earth or in the heavens has changed in all of human history. So where is the promise that Christ will return to earth and interrupt the march of man? That is the atheists' argument.

Yes, such cynics and skeptics do study the sky and see the order of the universe. But somehow they fail to see what David saw.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Psalm 19:1 (NIV)

Some consider Christ a great teacher. Others see Him as misguided mystic whose followers spun stories about Him to draw disciples and start a movement. But they are wrong.

The apostle Paul identified the foundational error of such star-gazing skeptics. They understand neither the Person nor the power of the sovereign God's Son.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15-17

Jesus was and is and ever shall be the Creator God. And it is His power alone that holds both molecules and galaxies together. He is the one who governs the spinning of planets and the shining of stars.

But on the Mount of Olives, the Savior spoke of a terrible day when He will loosen His hold on both the earth and the stars.

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. Verses 24-26

Our Savior's startling predictions were nothing new to the disciples. Since they were skinny little boys in synagogue school, they had heard the ancient prophecies.

"I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud and

***the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land,” declares the Lord God. Ezekiel 32:7-8
I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke.
The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. Joel 2:30-31***

Few prophecies are repeated by so many Old Testament prophets. Nevertheless, skeptics refuse to see the Creator’s gracious hand in His creation. Neither the miracle of spring nor the infallible Word of God can convince them.

They demand proof. So at the end of time, proof is precisely what they will get. The sun will refuse to shine. And showers of stars will neon the endless night.

When the sun goes dark, volcanoes send columns of smoke into the air, and rumbling earthquakes ripple the earth like the waves of a sea, men will be so terrified their hearts will fail them. Then every proud cynic will know Christ controls the elements.

But that doesn’t mean they will repent. Instead, as John saw in his heavenly vision, they will respond only with fear.

The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” Revelation 6:14-17

The fear that will drive proud men out of the minds won’t be misplaced. They will have good reason to be terrified.

That day of darkness and cosmic confusion is the sign the Redeemer is returning, not as Savior but as Judge.

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. Isaiah 13:9-10

***...the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction,2
Thessalonians 1:7-9***

Our Savior described those horrors with tears in His eyes. Christ was and is a God of love. And He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

“As I live!” declares the Lord God, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.” Ezekiel 33:11

Our Lord took the time to described the horrors that will accompany His coming because He loves us. That is also why He has preserved them in His Holy Word.

He offers these pictures of the end of time as a warning. When the sun is sackcloth, the sky is full of falling stars, and the earth is wracked and wrenched by earthquakes, it will be too late to come to the Christ of the cross and trust in His blood as the full and final payment for sin.

So if we are to find forgiveness and be delivered from both the power and the penalty of our sins, we dare not wait.

We must come to Him now while the sun still shines.

Deliverance

The scenes the Savior painted concerning His coming are the stuff of nightmares. And

many people prefer not to think about them, lest they wake up in a cold sweat.

But that which will bring distress and despair to the world will bring delight and deliverance to those who cling to Christ as Savior and Lord. After all, the Redeemer's return to this earth is every Christian's blessed hope.

Those who have never trusted in Christ and tasted the consolation of His compassion and the peace of His presence are wise to dread His coming. Jesus is their Judge.

But for us, He is our faithful Friend, our loving Lord and forgiving God. So we rejoice that His coming draws near.

To the world, Christ's coming means damnation. But to those who trust Him, it means deliverance. We see that most clearly in our Lord's final promise.

And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven. Verse 27

When this gathering our Lord described takes place, the harvest of saints will be long past. Seven horrible years will have come and gone since Christ called both dead and living Christians home.

But John wrote that during those years our Lord will call and commission 144,000 Jewish evangelists. At the same time, He will lift the veil that has hidden the Gospel from His ancient people.

And a great multitude of Jews will choose to trust in Jesus as both their Master and Messiah. They will be God's children and our brothers and sisters.

So before He pours out His wrath on those who refused His grace and rebelled against His Gospel, Jesus will gather up all of those who have chosen to love Him and live for Him. Just as the angels did at Sodom, our Savior will deliver those who belong to Him before He judges those who turned their back on Him.

That is a promise that can calm our fears and breathe peace into the worst of life's trials. Our God knows each and every person who has turned from sin and trusted in Christ's cross. He knows who they are and where they are.

The Lord Jesus is the great eternal Deliverer who loves us. Nevertheless, there will still be rivers we must cross and fires we must endure. But if our Lord doesn't deliver us, we can be sure He will be with us to strengthen and sustain us.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; Isaiah 43:2-3

We have a Savior who loves us. So we never need to worry. He is our delight in the best of times and our Companion and Deliverer in the worst of times.

He is all we have and all we need.