

Mark 13:24-27 "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."

Ended last week

## 1. THE COMING OF CHRIST WILL BE A CERTAIN AND ANTICIPATED EVENT.

This is one united voice of the Lord Jesus and all his apostles. Let us simply take the plain meaning of eight verses of Scripture. Christ himself said this, "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may also be" (Jn. 14:3). Immediately he had ascended into heaven two angels said to the disciples, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). His own apostle, Paul, said, "The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (I Thess. 4:16). The author of the Hebrews wrote that Christ "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28). James wrote, "the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). The apostle Peter said, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief" (2 Pet. 3:10). John, whom Jesus loved, wrote, "When he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (I Jn. 3:2). In the book of Revelation Christ promises, "Surely I am coming soon" and John's response is, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev.22:10). These eight testimonies give us one message, that we are to anticipate this certain event of the coming again of Jesus Christ.

## 2. IT WILL BE A CATAclysmic AND COSMIC EVENT.

All those verses told us that Christ would certainly come again. They did not tell us the manner of his coming Next, Jesus says, "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.'" (Mark 13:34). Christ is alluding to a number of Old Testament Scriptures here. He is, for example, taking the words of Isaiah

concerning the destruction of that great enemy of the people of God, Babylon, "The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light" (Is. 13:10). Babylon was the mightiest power in the whole world. The Babylonians worshipped the sun, moon and stars, but when the Lord returns all will be darkened in the judgment Jesus brings. The stars will fall from the heavens and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

Again the Lord in this sermon before us is echoing the words of judgment, which the same prophet Isaiah pronounced on the nation of Edom, which also worshipped the starry hosts of heaven. "All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed" (Isa. 34:4&5). That cruel mighty nation was going to know terrible cosmic destruction. Or when God comes in judgment upon his own defiant Jewish nation then Ezekiel tells us that he speaks of that judgment like this, "When I snuff you out, 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; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD." (Ez. 32.7&8). And again, when Joel the prophet speaks of what will happen when God's judgment comes on his defiant people, these are the words he uses - words Peter quotes on the day of Pentecost, "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;" (Joel 2:30-32). Jesus did not have to make up his own imagery to describe his coming at the end of the world. The language was already in the minds of the people of God.

He took the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jonah and he applied them to himself! Just as he took the sign of Jonah, or the lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, or the eating and drinking and giving in marriage before the judgment that

came when Noah preached righteousness to the people, and he applied those events to himself. Their ultimate fulfillment would not be until the last judgment when the Son of Man came in power and in great glory. Jesus is not here talking of the fall of Jerusalem, or the fall of Edom, or the fall of Babylon, or the fall of Germany, or the fall of eastern European communism. He is talking of his own final coming in judgment to the whole world. When Jesus Christ comes again the whole universe is going to know it. "For he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth" (Ps. 96:13).

The power of Christ will one day change his whole creation. The voice that said at the beginning, "let there be light!" will speak again, and the stars, the planets, the moon's light will all obey. In other words they will be what be what God purposes for them to be at that time.

What Christ creates He controls.

That is exactly how Peter understood Jesus' words, and that is how he proclaimed the end of the world to the church. He said, " the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed it's coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:8-13). Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ, preached a cataclysmic cosmic event.

### 3. IT WILL BE A PERSONAL AND GLORIOUS EVENT.

The Savior says, "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (v.26?). It will not be the heavenly events that will capture our attention for long; The focus of the whole universe is going to be on Christ. He is going to be seen, and every eye will see him. The Bible does not tell us how in the world that

will be possible. All it says is that the Christ who was once present in this world in his incarnate state will one day return in visible physical reality.

On this second occasion he will be "coming in clouds with great power and glory". The very same one sitting and talking to Peter, Andrew, James and John was going to return. While he was with them he was scorned by the religious establishment; he was there in lowliness and humiliation. He had come in obscurity. He in anonymity; incognito. He was surrounded by poverty, homelessness, oppression, lowliness and weakness. He came into pain, shame, dishonor, rejection. Three days after saying these very words men would strip him and nail him to a cross until he was dead.

When Christ returns he will come in the glory of the blessed God (Titus 2:13). "He will look like what he is. He will look like the world's Savior. He will look like God. He will come in the form that he had for a moment on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17; Mark 9; Luke 9). He will come in the kind of glory with which Jehovah came to Mount Sinai in the days of Moses (Exodus 19). He will come in the splendor that Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6.

"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," (vv.24-26). It will plunge the world into utter panic, despair and confusion.

The sun and the moon will do what they have never done until that day. The Bible tells us, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." (I Tim. 4:1&2). It will be a day in which men will be lovers of self rather than lovers of God; lovers of pleasure not lovers of God; lovers of money not lovers of God. There will be darkness in much of the professing church, and yet bursts of glorious light. It will be passing through a time of tribulation, but also great blessing, and then suddenly there will come a supernatural darkness to parallel the spiritual night in which people are

living. The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and money-loving men will tremble; self-loving women will weep; pleasure-loving young people will fear.

The Lord is going to do something quite outstanding and supernaturally spectacular to the creation he made.

#### 4. IT WILL BE A 'GATHERING TOGETHER' EVENT.

We are told that, "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." (v.27). The Shepherd of Israel, David's Lord, the one who took frail flesh and then claimed, "I am the good shepherd," the one who came to seek and to save that which was lost will continue to seek them until the end. He leaves the ninety and nine and goes searching over hill and valley until he finds his own sheep and rejoices when he has it on his shoulders. On the very last day Christ will still be seeking his elect. These are those sinners for whom a full atonement had been made, those whose sins had all been covered, those who had been born again, those who had been saved by grace through faith and that not of themselves, it was a gift of God, not by works lest any of his sheep should boast. The Lord will send his angels and gather them all.

Christ is coming, and it is not to give sinners one last chance, he is coming back to set up his throne of judgment and gather the world before him for the great separation. He is going to judge your life. The day for preaching will then be over; the time of gospel entreaties in which God's servants besought men and women to be reconciled to him will be gone. The free offer chapter in God's dealing with men is then closed forever.

He is coming for his people. When the angels appear it is not to give us a second chance. Jesus will say to all the sheep whom he has gathered, "Come with me! Glory awaits you!" He will say to the goats on his left, "Go. Depart from me to the other place," from which there is no return, in which there is no relief. We will all be going to the place which we have chosen for ourselves. That is, to be with Christ or without him.

Watching The Warning Signs

Mark 13:28-37 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back - whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

When you see the red lights flashing and you know there is danger ahead. You know the hazard lights are telling you to watch out. "You want to know when the temple is going to be destroyed? I have told you what are its precursors; there will be deceivers claiming to come from God, false Christs and false prophets; there will be wars and rumors of wars; there will be earthquakes and famines; you yourselves will be arrested and punished for preaching about me; there will be betrayals in families; you will see the abomination that causes desolation set up in the temple itself; you will see the Lord's people fleeing from Jerusalem to the mountains; there will be such days of distress for the people of Jerusalem, such as that city has never experienced in its entire history. Christ made the peril to come to Jerusalem spectacularly clear. "I have told you everything ahead of time" (v.23).

We know that he said to them, "Learn this lesson from the fig tree" (v.28). "As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near" (v.28).

Then it is also going to be obvious to every Christian when the fall of Jerusalem is imminent. He prepares every Christian for the destruction of Jerusalem - everyone who believes the word of Jesus Christ will be ready for it. That is the only qualification. Everyone with faith in Christ and with eyes to see what's going on all around will know that it won't be long. "Jerusalem Christians look around you! What do you see? This is what you see, deceivers claiming to come from God, false Christs, wars, earthquakes and famines, arrests and beatings for witnessing to Christ, betrayals in families. Then you will see the abomination that causes desolation set up in the temple itself. You will

all know from the least of you to the greatest of you these signs that the end of the temple is nigh; its days are numbered. Flee to the mountains!" So our Lord is most anxious that his disciples be prepared for this. He spent precious hours in the last week of his life talking about it to them - at considerable length. It was that important to him that they be ready for these things to happen.

Then Jesus moves on from the events of the last days in the world of old covenant Jerusalem to the last days in the whole present world system, and he prepares us in our generation for that event. Again he gives signs about what is going to happen before that occurs. Every single Christian will be aware of these events. It is not for the people who have read "The Late Great Planet Earth," or the "Left Behind" series of novels. Every single Christian in the whole world will know that the time of the coming of Christ is at hand.

What Jesus does is first to give us four general signs that show we are now living in the last days, the age that is heading for the end times.

1. The great expansion of the church shows that Satan is bound before Christ returns . That was not the case during the Old Covenant.

See what Christ says here, that before he comes again, "the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (v.10). Look beyond Galilee and Judah and Samaria to the uttermost corners of the earth. Let me be specific; before the end of the present age that must happen first, before Christ comes again, so that the work of mission is not some option which a few young people in a few churches might be considering. It is to be a passion and a burden within every single Christian heart. If I pray, "Thy will be done," then I am asking how can I further God's will. How can I promote the gospel? The devil cannot stop the spreading of the kingdom to any place in the world where God has ordained that it be known. We are not talking about numbers.

2. The second sign shows that the Spirit has been outpoured before Christ returns.

Though they are days of spiritual weakness they are not days of absolutely nothing at

all or we wouldn't be here today. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17). The Spirit regenerates every single believer, on every Jew and Gentile who believes in Christ. There is not a single Christian who lacks the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is given for us to understand what God has done in Jesus Christ and to assist us to face the hazards of Christian witness with wisdom, and courage, and boldness. "do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit" (v.11). "The New Testament evangelists, says the apostle Peter, preached the gospel with the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1 Peter 1:12). Here again we see the link between the last days and the responsibility of Christian mission. God gave the church an apparently impossible assignment: 'Go to all the Gentiles! Go to every creature!' (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15).

The third sign shows that today Christ lives and reigns before he returns.

We know where Christ is today and what he is doing. He is in the midst of the throne; he is head over all things to the church; he sits in heaven and does whatsoever he pleases. He builds his church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, and from heaven he will come again to judge the living and the dead. The greatest reality in the universe is the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

Of course God always reigned; he was always king, but now God the Son, risen and exalted, reigns in our human nature, "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebs. 4:15). He reigns to give eternal life to all those whom God has given to him. The unlimited resources of the Messiah are pledged to the furtherance of the gospel. There is no place where he is not Lord.

The gospel of the living Christ today has total global impact.

The fourth sign is that there is tribulation before Christ returns.

We are under an obligation to keep going into all of the world, making disciples of all

nations until Christ comes again, but we do so in the face of utter indifference and violent opposition. There will be no relief from that until the end of the world. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matt. 5:10-12). Charles Wesley was grasped by that vision of a dying world needing the gospel writing these words,

"Happy if with my latest breath I might but gasp his name,  
Preach him to all and cry in death, Behold, behold the Lamb."

In good times or bad, in strength and in weakness, we are here for a purpose until Jesus returns. Look to Him, love Him, love your neighbor as yourself, preach the Gospel until you cannot, make disciples knowing you can trust all Christ has said.