

*November 25, 2018*

*Isaiah 51:6, Jude 20-23, St. Mark 13:24-27:*

## ***“The End!”***

- I. The Simple Truth.*
- II. In the Mean Time.*
- III. We Will Be Gathered to Him!*

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Isaiah 51:6, Jude 20-23, St. Mark 13:24-27

Dear Friends in Christ,

I cannot describe the multitude of thoughts that have always passed through my mind when I read these words of Jesus:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days [The tribulation that has enveloped the church throughout the New Testament, and the great intensification of the tribulation as we draw so very close to the end, and as we are seeing today.] the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn... (Matt. 24:29-30a)

***All the tribes of the earth will mourn.*** The giddy delight we are seeing from this world's defiance of God's law and His love in Christ, and lawmakers passing laws to protect the defiance - the giddy delight and celebration of success will be shattered beyond anything comprehensible! And if you want a definition of the "giddy" try this: "make (someone) feel excited to the point of disorientation."

This Sunday is traditionally called "The Last Sunday of the Church Year." And the tradition has it that on this Sunday we consider this world's final moment. We're considering . . .

## THE END!

### I. The Simple Truth.

Our text from the Old Testament lesson of Isaiah sets forth the simple truth:

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; 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 my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. (Is. 51:6)

Take a look. Everything we see on earth and above us, the sky and the stars visible on a clear night, will bow to the last moment. Kretzmann writes of the heavens and earth:

The heavens, with its impression of endless stability...the earth with its uninterrupted succession of generations, both appearing to the human mind as established securely....both of them bound for destruction on account of their inherent vanity... (P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, Old Testament, Vol. II, p. 373)

It's the word that causes the greatest consternation for all earth dwellers: **sin**. It is the most hated and avoided topic because, as Scriptures say, "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom 6:23a) The death of all things. And, by nature, humans love sin.

The Holy Spirit reveals, "For the creation was subjected to futility (to decay, dying and death), not willingly, but because of him who subjected it..." (Rom 8:20) Creation was subjected to futility by God because of human sin. God said to Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you...thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you..." (Gen. 3:17b-18a) Sin has made a mess of human reasoning and thinking, brings human existence to its knees and death bed, authors hatred and war, cripples and destroys love and commitment, and assigns every human to endless wailing and agony.

It's the simple truth. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Matt. 24:35) And those words include every Word of Scripture I have put in front of you to this point - and every Word I will put in front of you from this point! Every Word of God!

One of the greatest delusions is that man will resolve his problems. Recall the words I read to you at the beginning of this sermon: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days..." (24:29a) Tribulation - the way it has always been for humankind, the way it is today, and its intensification as humanity moves towards the end of the end, as we are seeing.

## II. In the Mean Time.

In the mean time, in our Epistle lesson Jude bids us to pursue the following:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. (vv. 20-23)

It is most important to note that the Holy Spirit has Jude begin his Epistle with these words to us: "I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith...For certain people have crept in (that is, into the church everywhere, as has always been the case)...who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." (v.v3-4)

We want to take this to heart. The Christian life is never a life of worldly ease. That's not the focus! Jude says "contend for the faith." And we "contend", first of all, as Jude writes, by "building yourselves up in your most holy faith." And the building process begins and continues, first and foremost, through use of the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament. Doing something with the Word other than knowing a few favorite passages! Growth in knowledge and applying the knowledge.

Jude adds, "and praying in the Holy Spirit." Commentator Mark Jeske writes, "Pray with confidence, knowing that the Spirit has given you faith in Christ...that the Spirit intercedes for saints who don't quite know what or how to pray. Pray with confidence, knowing that the Lord processes every request." (Mark A. Jeske, General Epistles, People's Bible Commentary, CPH, St. Louis, p. 341)

These admonitions go way, way before we get all hyped up about what we're going to have of this world, dear friends! Again, Jude goes on to admonish us to keep ourselves in the love of God; namely the forgiveness of sin and gift of eternal life through faith in Christ. He says, "waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." And with that, "have mercy on those who doubt" because God has been and is so merciful to us. And, look, our job includes "save others by snatching them out of the fire." We are to be busy with God's business.

## III. We Will Be Gathered To Him!

And here's why we are to understand everything that has been put before us; from our Gospel lesson:

"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 in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. (Mk. 13:24-27)

At the beginning of this sermon I read a portion from St. Matthew's Gospel regarding Christ's return. I closed it with Jesus words, "all the tribes of the earth will mourn...". (Matt. 24:30) The word "tribes" is descriptive of the fact that even though humans are always scrambling for the Tower of Babel (unity), they remain and will remain fragmented and conflicted in various settings and groups of thinking, wants and desires - everything but oneness in God's love through Christ! They will remain Tribes!!

But, listen, our text says that when Christ returns, "he will...gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." This is who we are: the elect. Those who believe that Christ suffered the punishment for our nasty, damning sin and secured eternal life! We believe! And whoever believes has everlasting life.

Again, through faith in Christ we are part of the elect. As Scriptures say, "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." (Eph. 1:4) And this: "In him we have obtained an inheritance..." (Eph. 1:11a) And Peter reminds us that it is an eternal inheritance "that is imperishable, undefiled (not messed up by sin), and unfading (will never diminish in its joy), kept in heaven..." (I Peter 1:4)

The encouragement from Scripture remains the same for Christ's people today as we endure this world's growing turmoil, corruption, and intense division: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Lk. 21:28) For God's people the end is the beginning of forever...life and joy!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott