

The Day of the Lord

All week long as I studied this Gospel, I had a difficult time with a way to talk about the second coming of Christ that we just heard in the Gospel text. My own frame of reference is the Left Behind books. They were great novels and fun to read but I honestly don't believe that Jesus and God are going to cause all of that chaos. So I went to my favorite preaching references by Richard Jensen and William Barclay. So most of what I speak about this evening/morning is from them.

According to William Barclay in his writings on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 13 is one of the most difficult chapters in the NT for us to understand primarily because it was written for the Jews of Jesus' time. From beginning to end it is thinking in terms of Jewish history and Jewish ideas. All through it, Jesus used categories and word pictures which were easily understood by and very familiar to the Jews. On the other hand they are both unfamiliar and strange to modern day readers. But this chapter is important for us to understand because it is the source of an understanding about the second coming of Jesus.

Historically the Jews never doubted that they were the chosen people and would one day occupy the place in the world which they deserved. They were realistic enough to know that it would not be obtained by human means but rather they would need God to intervene directly in history to win it for them. They believed that the day of the Lord would be a time of terror and trouble when the

world would be shaken to its foundations and judgment would come. But it would be followed by the new world and the new age and new glory.

Between the OT and the NT there was a time when the Jews knew no freedom. A type of popular literature grew up that Jesus was familiar with called apocalypses. An apocalypses means an unveiling. This style of literature contained dreams and visions of what would happen when the day of the Lord came and in the terrible time immediately before it. This literary style was poetry, not prose. They were visions not scientifically provable facts. They were dreams not history. They were never meant to be taken as maps of the future and timetables of events to come.

As I mentioned earlier, the "Left Behind" series which made tons of money for Tim LeHaye and Jerry Jenkins, was based on an apocalyptic vision of the end times. They are both millenialists who believe that there will be a 1,000 year reign of Jesus before the actual end of time.

Jesus took the language, the imagery, and the apparatus of apocalyptic literature and used it to try to make people understand who he was. He was working with the ideas people knew. He knew these things were only pictures, for no one not even Jesus himself, could tell what would happen when God broke into the world.

This Gospel text begins with Jesus leaving the temple for the last time. This temple, built by Herod was one of the wonders of the

world. It was started in 20-19 B.C. During the time of Jesus it was not yet finished. This magnificent temple was built on the top of Mt. Mariah. Some of the stones were 40 feet long by 12 feet high by 18 feet wide. It was these vast stones that moved the disciples to such wonder and amazement. The porch consisted of a double row of Corinthian pillars all $37\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. Each one was cut out of one solid block of marble. Much of it was covered with thick plates of gold.

It was all of this splendor that so impressed the disciples. The temple seemed the summit of human art and achievement. It seemed so vast and solid that it would stand forever. But Jesus made an astonishing statement. "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down." It was less than 50 years later that Jesus' prophecy tragically came true.

As the disciples stood in awe of this mighty building Jesus' pronounced the climactic words against the temple. Temple stones will not be left standing. The corner-stone, however, will stand firm forever. In this somewhat coded language, we are given to understand that Jesus had come to replace the temple as the focal point of the divine-human relationship. A relationship with God is founded in the rejected stone who becomes the head of the corner. This is the God's doing.

Jesus not the temple is the cornerstone upon which our lives should be built. He is the very foundation of our faith. There will be trials ahead, but for those whose lives are given alignment by the

cornerstone, we live in hope that the pains endured are really birth pangs of the reign of God. God's word to us through Jesus' stories is something like this:

"I have sent my beloved Son to earth but the wicked have killed him. Nevertheless, I tell you that my Son is the sure cornerstone of your life. Trials will come to you who build your life on my gift of the cornerstone. There will be wars and rumors of war. Kingdom will rise against kingdom. You will be persecuted in untold ways. Fear not. Stand firm on the stone which the builders have rejected. Stand firm in Jesus, my Son. I will bring you through the trials to new birth. I will bring you through the trials to a kingdom which cannot be broken stone upon stone. I will bring you to a kingdom built on the eternal cornerstone. Jesus Christ."

Does a day ever go by when we don't hear about wars or rumors of wars? It is enough to make us lose hope in humanity, or want to close ourselves off and forget about the dangerous and violent world outside. It can make us want to give up and leave aside our call to go out into the world and make disciples.

Jesus' words, while chilling and disheartening are a reminder to us that the end could be near at hand or it could be a long way off. If we think things are bad now, guess what? They could get worse later. We can hear this as bad news or we can actually hear it as good news. There is still time! Our neighbor can still be served. The precious Word of God can still be preached. Your gifts and talents can still be shared.

While things might be tough in the outside world, that only means that what you have to offer is needed all the more. It is not the end of the world yet. Rather it is the beginning of our opportunity to make a difference in the lives of hurting, needy people throughout the world.

In a world of competing claims and promises, it can be difficult to see what God wants of us. We are constantly asking for clarity and vision in our Christian lives. We want to be able to see. We want to know. How should we live our lives? What are we to do with what we have? How should we build and maintain our relationships? What is God's plan for me?

As young folks are laid to rest this week from the shootings at Ft. Hood, we mourn. Even on one of our own military bases here in Texas, a terrorist did attack. As we listen to the news on a daily basis we wonder, "Will our country continue to fall prey to more terrorist attacks in the future?"

There will be wars and earthquakes and famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs. God is about to birth something glorious. We don't know when. We don't know how soon. But do we know where we are going when we die?

As Christians we know where we are going. In today's text Jesus talked in very clear language about what would happen prior to the end of the world. There is no room for false and fanciful interpretations in these words. Jesus talks about "false christs" who

would come in His name and deceive many. He warns that earthquakes, famines, war and rumors of wars and persecution of Christians will happen. He said, "Watch out!" several times. These are real warning not religious paranoia. As we look back on these predictions that Jesus made over 2,000 years ago, it becomes painfully clear that the end could be near.

Hopefully we proclaim our vision as Christians is simply Jesus. Our most profound answer, our strongest shelter, our greatest wealth - all these things lie in the promises made to us through Christ himself. Ultimately, the desire of our heart is Jesus and Jesus alone. Instead of being afraid of making the wrong choices, we believe it is not our will, our questions, our power, but Jesus'. In a great hymn with Irish roots we sing, "Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart." Take out your WOV and turn to page 776 and follow along.

1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art:
thou my best thought both by day and by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

2 Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord.
Thou my soul's shelter, and thou my high tow'r,
raise thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

3 Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always:
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.

4 Light of my soul, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Loving Father, when all seems lost, help us to turn to you. Give us
the courage to step into the hurting world and make a difference in
your holy name. Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my
vision, O Ruler of all. Amen