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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Proper 29, Series B (Last Sunday of the Church Year)
Sunday, November 21st, 2021¹

Title: Jesus' Mini Apocalypse – Part II
Texts: Mark 13:24-37

Focus: The Lord Jesus Christ will return at a day and time we do not expect.

Function: That they would be ready by faith for his coming.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ” (SC, 3rd Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The words of Jesus: “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when

the time will come.... And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” (Mark 13:32-33, 36,

ESV).² Last week we heard the first part of Jesus' so-called “Mini Apocalypse” from Mark

13:1-13, in which he predicted the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Jesus mentioned wars, earthquakes, and famines. And he gave the devastating prediction that not

“one stone” would be left upon another when all the magnificent buildings of the Temple

complex would be thrown down by the Romans.

But suddenly, today in verse 24, Jesus shifts his gaze from the near future in 70 A.D. to the *far future* at the end of the world:

“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

¹ There was no evening service on Saturday due to the Castle Rock Starlighting event.

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

glory. And then he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heaven” (Mark 13:24-27).

Jesus says this will happen “in those days” (v. 24). What days? 70 A.D. No, that doesn’t fit the description of Christ’s Second Coming. But in Mark 13 it seems to happen almost immediately upon the destruction of Jerusalem. How do we account for this?

Remember what I told you last week: that in line with the Old Testament prophets, Jesus’ vision of the future “telescopes” forward in time. Near future and far future events line up and have enough similar features, that from our present standpoint they appear to be one event. Nevertheless, there is a now/not yet reality to the End Times. The apostles speak in the New Testament as though we are already in the Last Days—and indeed we are (cf. Heb. 1:2; Acts 2:17). Ever since Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, we have been in the Last Days, and the Church has been suffering through the Great Tribulation as the devil assails the Church with wave after wave of persecutions. This is called a *proleptic* fulfillment—something that happens now that resembles what will happen later. Remember what Jesus said: “And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise up against parents and have them putt to death. And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (vv. 12-13).

But how will we *know* when the End has come? Jesus describes solar and lunar eclipses leading up to his return. He also describes stars falling out of the sky. Some Doomsday prophets make a big deal about so-called “blood moons.” But eclipses have been happening for centuries, and I’m not certain that Jesus is describing literal phenomena of astronomical proportions,

although he could be. I surmise there is a spiritual dimension to these shooting stars. Consider the following Scriptures:

“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And [Jesus] said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.... Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’” (Luke 10:17-18, 20).

“And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it” (Rev. 12:4-5).

Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. The dragon (AKA Satan) appeared in heaven, and in his primeval rebellion against God, he took down one-third of the angels with him. These became the demons described in Ephesians 6 as “the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

Yet Christ has conquered Satan by his death and resurrection. When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He dealt the kingdom of darkness a death blow. For no longer can Satan—whose name means “accuser”—stand in the presence of God, pointing out our sins to the Father. Listen to this vision from Revelation 12:

“Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and *there was no longer any place for them in heaven.* ⁹ And the great dragon was *thrown down*, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was *thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.* ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. ¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!’” (Rev. 12:7-12).

Do you see? The fall of Satan and his kingdom is described in terms of stars and cosmic powers being overthrown. This sounds very much like what Jesus says in Mark 13: “The stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (v. 25).

The devil is defeated, and Christ the King has won the day. Even now, Christ’s Kingdom is breaking into our world. Jesus says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). The kingdom of God is in our midst (Luke 17:21). The Kingdom of God is near, and it is here. Nevertheless, Christ also bids us to pray in the Lord’s Prayer for the *coming* of the Kingdom (Matt. 6:10). It’s here now, but not yet in its fullness. It’s a “now/not yet” reality. Right now we see the kingdom of God only with the eyes of faith. But a Day is coming when we will see the Kingdom come in all its fulness.

That will be the Last Day, when Christ comes in all his glory with the angels to gather the saints and judge the earth. “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26). This is another reference to the Book of Daniel (cf. Dan. 7:13). Remember what I said last week: You cannot study the End Times properly until you first study Daniel’s prophecy. Daniel’s visions are the foundation for every kind of apocalyptic writing after him. Even Jesus’ favorite title for himself, the Son of Man, is lifted right out of Daniel.

When Christ comes back on the Last Day, he will finally set the world to rights. The dead will be raised, the wicked will be judged, and the meek will inherit the earth—the new heavens and new earth that will appear on that Day. For, as Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mark 13:31; cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:13).

But again, how will we know when Christ will come back? *When* is the return of the King? Jesus says that nobody knows—“not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). Not even *Jesus* knows when he shall return! Think about that. Not even the Son of God knows which day will be the Last Day. There will be signs of that Day drawing near. (That’s why Jesus tells us the lesson of the fig tree!). But we can never know for sure.

Ever since Christ’s ascension, nearly every generation of believers has believed itself to be the last. Even Martin Luther suspected that the Turkish invasion of Germany might be a sign of the times. And yet we are still here.

So if we don’t know when the King is coming, how can we be prepared? Jesus says, “Be on guard, keep awake...” (Mark 13:33). At least a half dozen times in Mark 13, Jesus tells his disciples to “be on guard,” “keep awake,” and “stay awake.” But what does this *mean*?!

When I was about 10 years old, my younger sisters and I came up with an ingenious plan to meet Santa Claus. We would stay awake *all night* on Christmas Eve in order to catch Santa in the act. My sister Kirsten’s bedroom adjoined the living room where the Christmas tree and fireplace were. So we cracked the door open just an inch or two, so Santa wouldn’t see how sneaky we were. And then we all piled into my sister Kirsten’s room with our pillows and blankets, bringing with us a big supply of 2-liter bottles of Mountain Dew and plenty of candy. We would rely on caffeine and sugar to keep us awake all night. Then we would meet the jolly, old elf.

Unfortunately, despite all the Mountain Dew and candy, laughing and giggling, we kept getting tired and falling asleep. Each time we would wake in the middle of the night, we would

see that the bedroom door had been carefully closed. So we would reopen it a crack, take another swig of Mountain Dew, and eventually fall asleep again.

The next morning we awoke to find plenty of presents under the tree, but Santa Claus we never did see. We didn't stay awake.

“Keep awake!” Jesus says. “For you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” (Mark 13:35-36).

You cannot prepare for Jesus' coming by guzzling Mountain Dew on an I.V. drip. There is only one way to be ready for the return of the King: by *faith!* Christ came the first time to die on the cross for our sins. If you believe and trust in the forgiveness that Jesus won for you on the cross, then you already ready for the End. When Christ returns, you will not be caught with your pants down. You will be ready to answer his summons.

Nobody knows when Jesus will return. His timetable is a secret. But his return will be anything but secret. When that Day finally comes, everyone will hear and see the Son of Man coming in the clouds (Mark 13:26). You can't miss it!

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Take courage, indeed! The King is coming! He will make everything new. So stay awake. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of T the Holy Spirit. Amen.