

Sermon ✝ November 14, 2021

Mark 13:1-8

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A number of years ago I was getting ready to make a hospital call in Green Bay. The parishioner I was visiting was in intensive care. Of course, I was wearing my clergy garb.

I was just ready to leave when there was a knock on the front door. So I hurriedly opened the door and was immediately greeted by two well-dressed men who presented me with a couple of copies of *"The Watchtower"* . . . the premier publication of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

They were about to begin their spiel when they noticed my clerical collar. It stopped them in their tracks. Immediately, one of the men said, *"Have a nice day."* And they went of their way.

I guess one take away from this encounter would be that if you don't want to get into a long conversation with the Jehovah's Witnesses . . . it might be good to have a clerical collar handy.

While I'm not a big fan of their theology, I briefly perused their pamphlets. Predictably, they always contain pretty much the same message: *"The end is near . . . repent . . . God will soon take vengeance upon the wicked . . . non-believers are doomed to burn forever in the fires of hell."* You know, the usual comforting, feel-good kind of stuff.

Jehovah's Witnesses are pretty much all about the end times. They live in anticipation and hope for the great universal battle where Christ will lead the army of the righteous, composed of the *"host of heaven, the holy angels,"* and will completely annihilate the army of Satan.

Which actually brings us to the topic at hand for today. While certain denominations probably spend a bit too much time stressing about "the end times." We might do well to give such matters more thought than we do.

So much of what Jesus talked about dealt with the "end times". And how we are to live in light of such information? And what do we do with such texts? *"Oh, you know, Jesus was just kind of making conversation. He didn't really mean it."*

Well . . . like it or not, Jesus had a reason for talking about such things . . . and maybe we need to pay a bit more attention to all of this. We, of course, don't know when the end will come . . . but we can be better prepared,

Consider first this world of ours. We call ourselves modern . . . but you know as well as I do what is going on or not going on in this world of ours. Now of course, not everything is bad . . . but, from my perspective, as we become increasingly modern . . . it seems that we are becoming ever more violent.

We need to hear again the words of Scripture which speak of the end times . . . and we need to get scared!

*“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”*

Jesus was not telling this as though it might happen—*if*—he told it in as clear and positive a way as he taught any of his other truths. He spoke of it as an event certain to come . . . in due time.

The message is simple: *“Christians, wake up! We do not have all the time in the world!”* In fact, time is running out. Yet, in spite of the gloominess of this prediction . . . there is, within our Christian faith, a ringing, affirming note of hope.

There is that great story in *Genesis* where Abraham pleads with God not to destroy Sodom. Suppose there 50 righteous within the city (45, 40, etc, to 10). God said; “For the sake of 50 - 45 - 40 - 10, I will not destroy the city.” (In the end there were not even 10 righteous people, so God destroyed Sodom.) The Point: God wants us to succeed.

If in this world, there are to be found a nucleus of sincere, committed, believing, consecrated people . . . people who really love and serve God, who are sensitive to God's rights in this world, who will allow themselves to be filled with God's spirit and power . . . *if* there are such persons, God just might be persuaded to be merciful to us all.

It is possible . . . but, for this to happen, the church must wake up. We need to get our heads out of the sand (or our laptops) and become so keenly aware of the true picture of our present day world that it will literally scare *the hell out of us*. A little bit of heaven can get into us and fill the emptiness of our lives.

And there's no secret to how this works: It calls for people who are willing to work, sweat, sacrifice, live, believe, pray and love God's way . . . for the sake of God's kingdom.

If we, who call ourselves God's people, do not buckle down to live what we glibly profess with our lips . . . if we give only leftover minutes of our time and pennies as our sacrifices, then by our indifference the *end is clear and obvious!*

We must become so deeply engrossed in proclaiming the faith that we give and love, and give and love, and give and love until we drop in our tracks. It is possible. It is not too late. God always accomplishes God's work on earth through human intervention. God will not reach down and force humankind to stop playing the fool.

But God will reach out . . . through God's consecrated children . . . and transform foolish humankind. The key is: you and me . . . all of us. Those who endure to the end will be saved. Amen.