

## DAY OF THE LORD

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister,

Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, Pa

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark is one of the most difficult for a modern reader to understand. William Barclay describes it as "one of the most Jewish chapters in the Bible" filled with ancient Jewish ideas and allusions to Old Testament prophecies. For example, what Jesus said about the sun, moon, and stars echoes what Isaiah prophesied just before the fall of the city of Babylon hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. Isaiah wrote,

The stars of the heavens and their constellations  
Will not give their light;  
The sun will be dark at its rising,  
And the moon will not shed its light (Isaiah 13:10, 13; 24:21-23).

Isaiah wasn't writing about the end of the world but the fall of Babylon. Babylon! That great city Babylon will be thrown down, and be found no more at all! It's destruction will come like the end of the world.

*JUST AS ISAIAH ~~has foretold~~ described the Fall of Babylon as the end of the world. We ~~can~~ <sup>describe the events in our lives as the end of the world.</sup>*  
For some of us, the world ends many times before we die. I think of the funeral eulogy in the movie

*Four Weddings and a Funeral* where Matthew recites a poem by W.H. Auden in honor of his deceased lover, Gareth.

I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.  
The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Gareth's death extinguished the sun, moon and stars for Matthew. The death of a loved one hits us like the end of the world. And most of us, if we live long enough, experience the end of the world several times before we die.

*The disciples experienced the end of the world several times in their lives,*  
*The disciples of Jesus experienced the end of the world when Christ died. Jesus was their North, their*  
*They →*  
South, their East and West. He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He was the Sun of Righteousness and the Bright Morning Star. He was "fair as the moon, clear as the sun" (Song of Solomon 6:10). But when his enemies hung Jesus on the cross and he breathed his last, the earth shook, the sun was darkened, the moon no

longer gave its light, the stars of heaven fell, and the powers in heaven were shaken. The death of Jesus was the end of the world for his disciples.

The world ended again in A.D. 70<sup>for Jews & Christians</sup> when Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem. Years before, Jesus could see what was coming. St. Mark tells us in the beginning of the thirteenth chapter that Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives with Peter, James, John and Andrew. They looked across the Kidron Valley and saw the massive stones of the great walled city of Jerusalem. They saw the magnificent buildings and the temple crowning its highest point. Then Jesus told them that one-day soon not one stone would be left on another. Jesus said of that time to come, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven." He used language every Jew in his day understood perfectly. He wasn't speaking of the end of the natural world but the end of the world as it was then known (N.T. Wright). The end of all their hopes in the death of Jesus. The end of Jerusalem! The destruction of the Temple! Exile from the Holy Land! Their dispersion throughout the earth! The death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem spelled the end of the world for the disciples of Jesus.

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Jesus foretold these ominous events, not to scare, but to comfort his disciples. His disciples needed to know that despite his death, the frightening destruction of the Temple and the terrible tribulation that would follow - God was still in control. When the sun and moon stop shining and the stars fall from the sky God is sovereign. God is sovereign over the gathering darkness. The Risen Christ is the Light of the World. In him was Life; and the Life was the Light of all people. And the Light shines in the darkness; and the darkness will never be able to overcome that Light.

When the lights go out, God is still in control. The physical world did not come to an end when Babylon fell. Rather it meant the return of the Jews to the Promised Land and the rebirth of their nation. The physical world didn't come to an end when Jesus died. Rather his disciples lived to see Jesus risen from the dead and ascending into heaven on the clouds with great power and glory (Mark 13:26; Acts 1:9ff). And the end of the physical world didn't come when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. Rather it meant that Christians, like angels, messengers of God, were sent out by the Risen Christ to preach the good news and gathering God's elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Some of you feel like your world has come to an end. The sun is darkened and the moon does not give its beautiful light. The stars have fallen from heaven and you're left broken-hearted, bereft of hope. Your world has come crashing down. You sometimes wonder, "what's the sense of going on?" Maybe, your kids are beyond your control. Your marriage is falling apart. You've been diagnosed with cancer. You have ponderous financial burdens. You remember loved ones who were the light of your light -- but their light has been extinguished. Your whole world has come to an end. But the Good News is that God is sovereign over the darkness.

*If you have experienced God's presence in times past - and now his grace and all is going wrong - Christ has promised to come again!*

The Risen Christ, so long absent, has promised to come again. Heaven and earth may pass away, but his promise will never pass away. He promises a new creation. The old world has to perish before the new creation can begin. We don't know what the future holds. But God is sovereign. God is in control. God is going to win in the end. God is the invisible mover and shaker, creating a new heaven and earth. The Risen Christ is the "Firstborn of the new creation."

Our job is to watch for signs of his coming and of God's new creation. I don't know when he'll come. I don't know *how* he'll come. But he'll do what he has promised. The sun will shine again and he'll light up the moon. Once more "midnight stars (will) make bright the night." But "Of that day and hour, no one knows." Yet "every now and then, every here and there" we catch a glimpse of God's new creation. We see a sign in the resurrection of Jesus when he came to his grief stricken disciples. We see signs of his coming in the lives of men and women who have been made new creations through faith in Christ. This morning we see signs of Christ's coming in the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion. If you feel like your world has come to an end, come to Jesus as he comes to you in the Sacrament this morning. He comes to you, not as your enemy, but your Friend and Savior. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock", he says. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."

Eternal God, you taught us that the night is far spent and the day is at hand. Keep us awake and alert, watching for your kingdom, and make us strong in faith, so that when Christ comes in glory to judge the earth, we may joyfully give him praise; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.