

Daniel 12:1–3

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Hebrews 10:11–25

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ¹⁶“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” ¹⁷ then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” ¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Mark 13:1-13

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him,

“Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” ² And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

⁹ “But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

¹² And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will

rise against parents and have them put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

When's the end.

For some time now, when I discuss what's happening in the US and in the world with some of you, I conclude that you've decided we're in the end times. I.e. the end is now upon us! There are all those natural disasters that seem to be laying waste to countries and people all over the world: earthquakes, wildfires, tsunamis, floods, and hurricanes, just to name a few. And of course don't forget the ongoing wars and rumors of war that flood our senses constantly. We've become so accustomed to hearing of the terrors of war nowadays that war has become our "new normal." Given how all this is going in the world right now, perhaps it is time to head into the bunker while the world destructs and Christ returns.

OK, what does God have to say about all of this? Sadly, as simple as it is, that's so often overlooked. We have our opinions and we often don't let the truth stand in the way of what we believe! So what exactly was Jesus referring to when He spoke of these very signs in our text for today? Was He talking specifically about the end of the world and Judgment Day? This may surprise you, but if you read this text (and the other parallel Gospel accounts) you find that Jesus is not speaking here about the end of the world and Judgment Day. He's talking here about the terrible, sinful things that will happen in the days leading up to Judgment Day. He's talking here about "everyday life" as a Christian living in a fallen and sinful world. However, that is not to say that this conversation doesn't roll into Judgment Day talk. It does but that's next week.

Let's just take a look at the signs Jesus refers to. There will be wars, rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes. Unrighteous rulers, leaders, and entire governments will persecute Christians and put them and their faith on trial.

Families will turn on each other because of faithfulness to Christ. People will fight and die because of Christ.

Do you honestly think that we're the first generations to have to deal with these things? Three years ago when I preached on this text, I mentioned that more Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than ever before. These troubles didn't just start with a recent war, gay marriage, legalized killing of babies, health insurance fiasco or out of control government. These birth pains have been going on since sin entered into the world! I want you to think about the context in which Christ is speaking these specific words. He's talking to a group of disciples who are looking around at the magnificence and splendor and stability of the temple buildings. Jesus tells them to not look to those earthly vessels and creations for confidence or security or hope. As a matter of reinforcing His lesson He tells them that not one single stone of that huge, beautiful temple will be left standing upon another, something which came to fulfillment in the year 70A.D. He tells them about wars, rumors of war, famines, earthquakes, and various persecutions and martyrdoms. Well, these things have been happening all over the world for a long time. Some of these very things happened with Christ and His crucifixion. What do you think was going through these guys' heads when they saw Christ hanging on a cross and then they see the sky go black and the earth shake, causing rocks to split and the temple curtain to tear? These signs didn't just begin to happen when someone you don't like was elected as President!

So why did Jesus tell His disciples such terrifying things? He was telling them these things so they wouldn't lose their faith when the going got tough. He was teaching faithfulness, not prophecy. He was giving them a good healthy dose of reality. "Stay faithful. Trust in Me above all things, not just in the good times when it's easy, but also in the bad times to come—especially

in the bad times to come." Stay faithful. Life still went on after the terrifying events of Good Friday, didn't it? Life is still going on now, despite all the calamity and terror we've witnessed in our lives.

Now I'm not minimizing or dismissing these terrifying and alarming signs and birth pains as nothing for us to worry about. These signs of sin are terrible and we do still wear sinful flesh. These signs are themselves dangerous to faith. We need to be concerned. We need to be constantly alert and vigilant. This is why Christ urges us to be on guard and pray always. Contrary to the popular saying, there are plenty of atheists in foxholes when the bullets start flying. Trials and tribulations don't convert people to Christianity. Many times it's quite the contrary. Trials and tribulations can actually recruit and make atheists out of believers! How? Think about it: The most difficult place to believe in the goodness of God; in His providence and care and mercy, is in the midst of evil and chaos. Look to Christ on the cross. Do you see peace, life, and salvation or do you see vengeance, defeat, and death? I guess that depends on whether you're looking through the eyes of saving faith or the eyes of this fallen and sinful world. War, famine, natural disaster, family infighting, like divorce, death, and illness, is all evil; all signs of sin. These things all serve as great recruitment tools for the devil. People lose their faith all the time the minute the trials and tribulations of life start flying. Watch and pray and put your trust in God above all things, because the more evil you have to endure, the more your faith will be tested and the more danger you and your saving faith are in.

Now, this is what life is like as a Christian living in a world that either doesn't know or can't stand the truth of Jesus Christ and His love for us. Christian life is not that fluffy version that says all will be easy and rewarding and a huge success if you just have "a little more faith." That's a lie. That's not the truth spoken in love.

The truth is this: Life is especially difficult when it's a life lived in faith. However, take heart. Nothing has ever overtaken you except that which is common to all man. You have not been singled out. Look at your brothers and sisters and neighbors with sympathy. They are all hurting, the same as you. If it seems to you that they have it easy, you are wrong. No one has it easy. The crosses we bear are all custom-made. What would be easy for you is not easy for them, and what is hard for you would be easy for them. Each of us is called according to his own gifts and talents, and yet each call is the same: stay faithful, remember the coming Day of the Lord, and live by grace. Comfort one another. Encourage one another. Love one another, as you have been loved. Forgive one another, just as you have been so graciously and lovingly forgiven.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Christ has died in your place, claimed you in Baptism, forgiven your sins and declared you righteous, holy, and innocent. He is now your eternal Advocate, Mediator, and Redeemer, and He is coming back to bring you home with Him. He will not fail. Lift up your heads the Lord comes. You will never be alone. Be neither afraid nor sad. Your redemption draws near.

In the meantime, in the midst of all these terrible and sinful things the Lord continues to come to you as He has promised; in His Holy Word and Sacrament. You are not alone. You have the Lord. He is your Lord. He comes to speak words of warning and comfort to you. He comes to feed your body and soul with His Word and His Body and His Blood so that you will be strengthened for the times and trials to come; so that you will have joy and peace that surpasses all understanding while you wait and live, even while you suffer. For He is not simply your Lord in the future, when all sorrows shall cease, but He is also your Lord now, even in the midst of sorrow, even in the midst of everyday life.

To Him alone be all glory, praise, and honor!

AMEN

