

November 17, 2024
Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 13:1-13 (Hebrews 10:11-25; Daniel 12:1-3)

BITTER PAINS TRUMPED BY THE SWEETNESS OF THE GOSPEL.

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

In the last verse of our Gospel text this morning Jesus says:

“And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Mark 13:13)

Today is the second-last Sunday of the church year. Our Gospel text this week and next, come from St. Mark’s Gospel the 13th chapter, where Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple and the second coming of the Son of Man on the Last Day. Ever since ancient times, mankind has been obsessed with the end of the world. Whether it’s because of religious prophecies, environmental concerns, climate change, or computer-generated special effects from Hollywood fiction that depict frightening images of a catastrophic end of the world, the terrors of the End Times lurk in the hearts and minds of many people.

It is true. We are living in the End Times right now. The End Times began with the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus. (cf. Hebrews 1:1–2; 1 Peter 1:20) Unless Jesus returns real soon, all those born and come after us will live in the End Times... and we will do by the grace of our Lord until the Last Day comes. For all who trust and believe in Christ, it’s a time of living with one foot in the present and the other in the future.

Holy Scripture is clear that the heavens and the earth are moving closer to their appointed end every day, and that day is known only by our Father in heaven. Likewise, the Holy Christian Church is also moving to her appointed end, which is eternal life in and with Christ Jesus, which will come to its fulfilment also on the Last Day. As just prior to the sermon hymn you confessed the biblical teaching that on the Last Day, Jesus:

“... will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead...” (Nicene Creed)

Our Scripture lessons this morning describe the future end of the world as we know it as a bittersweet end. In the future the heavens, the earth, and all who die without lifesaving faith in Christ Jesus will come to a bitter end as they suffer God’s righteous judgment. The future is also bitter because of the tribulation Christians will face as the Last Day approaches.

But our readings also describe the future as sweet... providing sweet comfort and assurance that all who’re in Christ Jesus are safe and secure in His loving hands, regardless of what you might see or experience as you await the final Day. The future is sweeter beyond all imagination for the

believer whose name is written in God's Book of Life, for they have God's promise that they will endure to the end and be saved. (cf: Revelation 2:10, 3:5)

All you have to do is look around and you'll recognize that were living the End Times as Jesus describes in our Gospel text. Believers and unbelievers alike already suffer bitterness in this broken and sinful world. You suffer from aches and pains... some people from diabetes, cancer, or other diseases. You suffer from broken promises, broken relationships, and broken hearts, and possibly, you are the cause of broken promises, broken relationships, and broken hearts. For those sins – repent and receive Jesus' forgiveness.

While mankind enjoys great advances in science, medicine, and technology, the devil and his minions use much of it for evil and the detriment mankind. Plus, each and every one of us still suffers from the disease of Original Sin, inherited from our ancestors Adam and Eve. You see the evidence of this sin in your own life and in our society's continual slide ever deeper into moral and spiritual depravity, all while claiming to be growing in wisdom. For those sins – repent and receive Jesus' forgiveness.

In our first reading, the prophet Daniel describes the bitter as:

“... a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.” (Daniel 12:1)

God reveals some of the catastrophic things that will happen during the End Times, so that when they do happen, you won't be shocked or think that He's no longer in control. But He also reveals the sweet... the big picture of how things will turn out for those who trust in Jesus for eternal salvation. God gives you certainty in the face of uncertainty to give you strength and confidence in His steadfast love, protection, and providence.

The birth pains are grim: wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, earthquakes and famines. (cf: Mark 13:8) In parts of the world people are beaten and delivered over to death for their Christian faith: parent against children and children against parent. (cf: Mark 13:12) It won't be long until it's happening in our community as well. For Jesus says:

“... you will be hated by all for my name's sake.” (Mark 13:13)

The bitter truth is, unless Jesus returns real soon, everybody dies. You and me and all mankind. Mortality is 100 percent. You cannot escape death – but you *can* escape an unfaithful death. So, Jesus gives you this warning:

“See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.” (Mark 13:5–6)

Unfortunately, many false prophets and false teachers have led and continue to lead believers away from the truth. Even among Christian denominations, false teachers dismiss Bible's teaching on the topics such as sin, sexuality, and who Jesus really is. They whitewash God's Word in the name of tolerance and inclusiveness, reducing Jesus and the Gospel as role models for how to live and play nice together.

Of course, God doesn't want us to become fatalists or doom sayers. He gives you a healthy dose of the sweet reality that is yet to come so you'll remember what's really important. And that's

the true Gospel of Christ Jesus, as proclaimed by the whole council of Holy Scripture. (cf: Acts 20:27) The Gospel is not words to be reduced or a guideline for how to live. St Paul writes:

“... the gospel... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...”
(Romans 1:16)

The Gospel is the Good News of Christ crucified for sinners... crucified for you and your salvation. The Gospel is the power of God. The hearing of the Gospel not only declares salvation, but it also causes and delivers salvation. God is able to accomplish and what humans are unable or without power to do. God’s power acts effectively toward salvation. He is in control now – and – always will be.

As His Baptized child, you have His Gospel promise. You don’t have to fear those who can kill the body, rather, you fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (cf: Matthew 10:28) If and when you’re called to testify because of your faith, the Holy Spirit will give you the words to bear witness to the Gospel and Christ Jesus. (cf: Mark 13:11) And even if you’re martyred for the true faith like so many who’ve gone before, for the sake of Jesus, your eternal future is certain and secure. The worst thing that can happen is that you are folded into your Savior’s loving arms in heaven. How sweet is that?

In our first reading Daniel describes this security. While you await Jesus’ return, you have protection from God’s mighty archangel:

“Michael, the great prince who has charge of [God’s] people.” (Daniel 12:1)

Michael is the leader of a company of God’s angels, who right now are fighting an invisible war, guarding believers from the devil and all his minions who seek to hurt not only in body but especially in soul. And with certainty, Daniel declares deliverance of the Last Day, saying:

“... at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.” (Daniel 12:1)

This book of life lists all who’ll be delivered into the eternal glory of heaven... all who’ve been called to faith in the hearing of the Gospel. (cf: Romans 10:17) And all, who by means of Holy Baptism, have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Jesus. (cf: Revelation 7:14)

What does the future hold? Scripture doesn’t give us all the details – but it does tell us how the story ends. Jesus knows exactly the hardship you’ll face in these End Times: natural disasters, dangers, and the persecution that awaits God’s people. Some will be martyred for their witness; others will simply die, falling asleep in the Lord. But whenever the end comes for you, Jesus promises to be with you. His grace is sufficient to enable you to endure to the end. (cf: Mark 13:13) The Holy Spirit will guide and protect you through all adversity for God has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all who believe.

God sent His only begotten Son in the flesh of man to be your High Priest, offering His body as a single sacrifice – once for all time (cf: Hebrews 10:10–14) on Calvary’s cross, for the sins of all mankind. No other sacrifice is needed because Jesus’ perfect sacrifice brings perfect forgiveness. And wherever there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.

As you await the Last Day, having life and salvation through Christ Jesus, the writer to the Hebrews urges you to:

“... consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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.” (Hebrews 10:24–25)

Unless Jesus returns real soon, in this life, we all die. You cannot escape physical death – but you have Jesus’ promise when He says:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (John 11:25–26).

Having life and salvation in Jesus, you are His witnesses to a corrupt and faithless generation. Not everyone goes to heaven. On the last Day, some will be raised to eternal life, and others to eternal death. The time is short. Repent of your sins – and believe in the Gospel. (cf: Mark 1:15) Bear witness to the hope that is in you. Share the redeeming love of the Christ Jesus who gives forgiveness of sins, and grants life and salvation to all who believe. In the words of the writer to the Hebrews:

“... 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.”
(Hebrews 10:21–23)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.