

## THE COMING SON

### Mark 13:21-27

Well today is Advent Sunday. The word advent derives from the Latin *adventus* meaning arrival. It's the beginning of the church year, when we light our first advent candle and celebrate not only the incarnation of Jesus Christ at that first Christmas just over 2,000 years ago, but look forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ on the final day when this age will come to an end. Advent has its foundation in Christian hope, the hope provided by God's coming amongst us in the person of Jesus Christ. As Hoefler writes, "We are saved and redeemed not because we have successfully made the effort to come to him, but because he has made the surprising effort to come to us." In the first Advent, Christ the Lord came into the world in human form as a helpless child to suffer and die on a cross. In the next Advent, Christ the Lord, will come in power and glory as Judge of the world and of all the world's sovereignties and dominions, principalities and authorities, presidencies and regimes, in vindication of his Lordship and the reign of the Word of God in history.

In our reading today we focus not on Jesus's original incarnation, but on his second and final coming. So as we study this passage together you can find our reading on page [\*\*\*] of the church bibles and all the scripture I'm going to refer to will be projected on the screen. The reading forms part of what is usually called the "Olivet Discourse", because Jesus was teaching His disciples on the Mount of Olives, preparing them for His coming passion, His death and resurrection.

The verses immediately preceding our reading provide a background. The imagery is of terrible times of great distress, although most statements probably refer to the coming destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD whilst some refer to the end times.

As we move into our reading the references are clearly applicable to the end times, although they were also relevant to the first century AD. Look at verses 21-23:

“At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.” (Mark 13:21-23 NIV)

This final historical crisis invites a final wave of messianic pretenders and prophets, but they will not be able to bring to a halt the distress convulsing the land. These false prophets will seek to deceive everyone including Christians. Deuteronomy chapter 13 had warned long ago about men of lies who would seek to lead the faithful astray with their signs:

“If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3 NIV)

Believers are warned to be on their guard or pay attention, to keep watch, in what is quite a strong statement in the original Greek. Here Jesus is warning the church and individual believers – us – not to be diverted or distracted from obedience to Christ. Jesus and Mark are also preparing us for Jesus’s passion and death by telling of his ultimate triumph.

Let’s move on to look at verses 24-25:

““But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”” (Mark 13:24-25 NIV)

Set against the false hopes which will mislead many people in the critical moment is the assurance that the period of suffering and distress often referred to as the tribulation will be followed by final

redemption when the Son of Man will be manifested in power and glory. This is not a vain hope but a certain statement by Christ of what will come. The link between these two phases of God's programme for the end times is indicated only in a general way: "in those days, following that distress ..." This is clearly after the days of distress and tribulation of verses 19 and 20, although the exact time sequence isn't given to us. But it's quite clear that Jesus, the Son of Man, will not return until all these things have happened, although they don't in themselves determine the time of the second coming.

These verses are rich in scriptural imagery. The prophet Joel said: "Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine." (Joel 2:10 NIV)

and Isaiah said:

"The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light." (Isaiah 13:10 NIV)

Many of the prophets foresaw the dissolution of the cosmos accompanying the intervention of God in history. They're saying that the universe is united with man in his destiny, so an upheaval in the universe accompanies a remaking of the destiny of humankind. We're looking at the passing of the old order and the establishment of a new order. For many in Mark's day (and for some in ours) the stars were thought to be heavenly powers that influenced human affairs. Here we're told that at the end of this age all such powers, real or imagined, will be eliminated. Darkness and chaos will envelop everything just as it was before the beginning of creation in Genesis Chapter I.

Let's move on again to look at verses 26 and 27:

"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens." (Mark 13:26-27 NIV)

Here everything is attributed to Christ. He not only returns, but he gathers those chosen and called by God – the elect – and they are His. His triumph is described in terms that remind us of the enthronement of the Son of Man in our reading from Daniel 7:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14 NIV)

But the Son of Man is not, as in Daniel, brought to God’s throne, instead he comes to gather the scattered people of God. He comes as a sovereign on a chariot of clouds in what is usually called the *parousia*. This is a Greek word meaning presence or arrival and often referring to an official visit by a sovereign or ruler – so you can see why it’s an appropriate word to apply to Christ’s second coming.

Here we need to remember that Christ had earlier predicted that he would be rejected, humiliated and put to death (Mark 8:31) and the ambiguity in the role of Jesus as the Son of God will only be finally resolved in this second coming in glory. Tribulation, suffering and death are not to be the end point of history. No, the triumphant return of Christ will mark the end of the world as we know it.

The statement that the Son of Man will send forth his angels to gather the elect brings together Deuteronomy 30:4 and Zechariah 2:10: “Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.” (Deuteronomy 30:4 NIV)

“Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the LORD.” (Zechariah 2:10 NIV)

Originally, these Old Testament verses applied to the Jewish nation, the Israelites, although here they apply to all believers, to all God’s

people. To scatter to the four winds (Jeremiah 9:15-16; Ezekiel 5:10) and to regather from the four winds, every country (Ezekiel 11:17; Deuteronomy 30:3-4; Jeremiah 23:3) or the ends of the earth (Isaiah 11:12) are recurrent Old Testament themes. The nation of Israel lost its national identity and was scattered as a result of their disobedience to God, but here we're told that they will find salvation in a return to national and spiritual unity. It's a fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel:

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered." (Daniel 12:1 NIV)

For other believers perhaps the scattering is a result of the tribulation.

The coming destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, which took place at the hands of the Romans in 70 AD, would not result in Israel's permanent dispersal. On the contrary it will eventually be followed by a regathering of the people of God, both Jews and non-Jews, around the Son of Man, around Jesus. The remnant of Israel will recover their unity in and through Jesus. This will happen everywhere, because that's what Mark's expression, "from the ends of the earth to the ends of the Heavens", means. But let me stress here that there is absolutely no mention of either a rebuilt Temple or a restoration of Israel as a temporal nation – both things which some proclaim. Nor do we have any hint as to when Christ will return.

Let me emphasise once again, that although these verses have great significance for the remnant of the Israelite nation who have turned to Christ in faith, we must see the gathering of the elect as referring to all Christian believers, not just the Israelite remnant.

Jesus knew that he was the fulfilment of Israel's history and that his mission was already recorded in the Jewish scriptures. His coming is a promise and the gathering of all believers to him is our sure hope. But Christ will not only return to gather his people to him, he will return as the judge of the whole world, as Paul writes:

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, .....

” (2 Timothy 4:1 NIV)

At his first coming Jesus came in human form, born as a helpless babe, to live among us, to train and teach a small band of disciples and then die on a Roman cross, crucified to pay the death penalty that every human being deserved to suffer on account of their sins. We’re all sinners each and every one of us, including me and all of us here today. As the apostle John wrote:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8 NIV)

After his crucifixion Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven to return to the Father. But that’s by no means the end of the story. As we’ve seen today, at the end of this age, Christ will return. Not this time as a helpless babe, but in power and glory as the judge of the whole world. But, if we’ve turned to Christ in faith, we have nothing to fear from that judgement; for Christ has already paid the penalty we deserve to suffer. Christians who have a true faith and belief will be gathered up by Christ from the four corners of the world in preparation for spending eternity with God in glorious resurrection bodies.

But, remember, no one knows the day or the time of Christ’s second coming; so let’s not be caught out. Jesus told us to be ready:

“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:36 NIV)

Here the watching focus is inward not outward, we need to watch ourselves. We need to fill ourselves with the only unchanging thing in the universe which will survive the last day – God’s word. Jesus said a little further on in the teaching we read from today:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Mark 13:31 NIV)

We all need to make sure that we’ve prepared ourselves for Christ’s return. We need to be sure that we’ve repented of our sins and turned to Christ in genuine faith so that we shall not be judged and found

wanting on that last day but rather be safely gathered up into Christ's loving presence. As the apostle John wrote:

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

(1 John 5:12-13 NIV)

Father as we wait patiently for the return of Your Son on that last day, I pray that you will give all of us here a true saving faith so that we may enter into your salvation, into eternal life with you. Let us all keep watch in these last days and not be distracted or turned aside from Christ by anything happening in this world or in our lives and help us in this by keeping us in your word, the only and unchanging and eternal thing which will survive that second advent.