

The Preview

Mark 13:24-37

The Last Sunday of the Church Year, November 22, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Now our Lord finally gives a description of the end of the world.

He says that it is after “that tribulation.” What tribulation is He talking about? He is talking about the tribulation that He described last Sunday. The tribulation that He described last Sunday is the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Since the Romans destroyed the temple in AD70 just like Jesus said that they would, we are now living after “that tribulation.” We are living the time that our Lord will now predict.

He says that the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. Other places in the Bible say that the fundamental elements making up the universe will melt in the heat. That means that on the Last Day of the universe there will be an intense heat. I can only assume that such heat will be the result of our Lord’s return for judgment. If the fundamental elements making up the universe melt in the heat of His coming, that means that the objects in the universe will be melted also. Two very prominent objects in the universe are the sun and the moon. Even they will melt down in the heat of our Lord’s return. Our Lord’s heat must be pretty intense because the sun is pretty hot.

You should expect no less of the creator of the universe. All things were made through Jesus. Therefore Jesus is the creator along with God the Father. He made all things. He redeemed all things. Jesus has promised you and me a new creation in which to live. He has promised us that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. He makes this promise through the prophet Isaiah on two occasions. He repeats the promise through His holy apostle Peter in 2Peter 3. In this new heaven and new earth righteousness will dwell. That means that everyone who lives in the new heaven and the new earth after our Lord’s return will be righteous. We have discussed this phenomenon before. When the Lord raises you from the dead on the Last Day, He will make you glorious, righteous, mighty, and perfect. You will no longer commit sins. Your flesh will be transformed in such a way that you will no longer sin. No one else will sin against you.

Not only is that the case when our Lord returns, but the heavens and the earth will be transformed. In the New Heaven and the New Earth, there will be no death. In order to push that point home Isaiah prophecies that even lions will eat straw like the ox. Isaiah prophecies that the wolf will lie down with the lamb. That means that in the new heaven and the new earth the wolf will not eat lambs. Lambs can lie down in front of wolves and the wolf will not kill them and eat them. Isaiah makes these predictions in order to show that in the new heaven and the new earth there will be no death. John in the book of Revelation makes similar prophecies. He says that in the new creation the sun will not harm us by day nor the moon by night. That is an expression that means that even the powers that God appointed to govern the day and the night will not harm us. And if they will not harm us nothing in heaven or earth will either. John prophecies that God will wipe every tear from our eyes. That is a way of saying that there will be no cause of tears in the new heaven and the new earth. It is a way of saying that there will be no more death.

In order to have a creation in which there is no death, the creation must be remade. It must be recast. That is what our Lord does when He melts it down in the heat. He is melting down the old creation in order to recast it fresh and new the way that it was in the beginning only better. So when you live in the new heaven and the new earth, you will recognize the heaven and the earth. The new heaven and the new earth will be similar enough to this heaven and this earth for them to be familiar to you, but

the new heaven and the new earth will contain no sin and no death whatsoever. You will live as resurrected people in front of Jesus and His Father for all of eternity. Once again God will walk with you in the cool of the day.

Now when the Lord returns on the Last Day and melts down the old heaven and the old earth, that will include the sun and the moon. So when the Lord returns on the Last Day, the sun will not shine nor will the moon give its light.

The next thing that happens on the Last Day of the universe is that every eye will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with much power and glory. Other places in the Scripture predict that when it says that every eye will see Him that includes the ones who pierced Him. That means that the Roman soldiers who put our Lord to death by crucifixion will see Him coming on the clouds with much power and glory. Even Pontius Pilate himself who sentenced our Lord to death will see Him coming on the Last Day with much power and glory. Caiaphas and the Jewish ruling council will see Him coming. Judas Iscariot will see Him coming with much power and glory. That means people that on the Last Day of the universe Jesus will raise the dead. When He says that every eye will see Him, it means that every eye will see Him.

This should not surprise you. Jesus is the creator of all life. He created your bodies. He created your souls. Therefore when Jesus comes to redeem His creation, He is redeeming your soul and your body. When our Lord dies on the cross He is not merely redeeming your souls. He is redeeming your bodies as well. Jesus created both. He redeems both. Jesus did not merely rise from the dead a soul. He rose from the dead soul and body. Therefore the redemption of our bodies must reach its fulfillment. That means that the death to which our bodies are subject must at last be overthrown. This will happen on the Last Day when Jesus returns. Those who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out. Some will rise to everlasting life and others will rise to everlasting shame and condemnation. If you want the Bible passage on that that demonstrates that I am right, please open your Bibles later today to John, chapter five, and read your own Lord's prediction of your resurrection.

Every eye will see Jesus coming on the clouds with much power and glory. That includes your eyes.

After Jesus comes He will send out His angels to gather the ones He has chosen. No matter where they live or where they died He will gather them. From the ends of earth to ends of heaven He will gather them. So even if we have a colony on Mars by the time our Lord returns or even if we are traveling the stars by the time He returns, He will still gather His elect from the ends of heaven.

Then Jesus tells us a bunch of stuff that I am assuming that you already know. He says that the day and the hour is unexpected. That is to say that the day when He returns and the world is melted and restored and He raises the dead and sends His angels to gather you from wherever it is that you are is a day whose time is unknown to us. The angels do not know. Not even Jesus Himself knows. Only the Father knows.

Oh sure, Jesus gives us some clues. He tells us that when the fig tree puts out leaves and fruit that you know that summer is near. He compares that to the destruction of the temple. When the temple is destroyed and when the signs of its destruction repeat themselves then you know that the return of Jesus is close at hand. This is a warning to us to keep watch for His coming so that we will not be caught unawares. It is a warning to us to repent of our sins now and not wait until tomorrow. If you wait until tomorrow and He returns today you will be damned.

Jesus warns us by telling us about a house holder who went away on a journey and left tasks for His slaves to complete. He gave each slave the necessary authority to complete his task. He told the one at the door to stand watch. In the same way Jesus has given you your individual tasks. He has given you the authority to complete them. We call them vocations or callings. He expects you to be doing those things to which He has called you when He returns. You keep watch by doing what He has called you to do rather than doing something else or being lazy and doing nothing at all. That way when He returns on the clouds with much power and glory, He finds you doing what He called you to do. Since the time of His return is unknown, we are to be busy about our vocations all of the time so that no matter when He returns we are prepared for His coming.

No surprises here.

What is surprising is that our Lord says that the generation who is alive at the time when He makes these predictions will not pass away until all of these things are fulfilled. Now remember Jesus, our Lord, is addressing Peter, James, John, and Andrew. He predicted how the temple would be destroyed. He told them what would happen to them. Then He tells them about the end of the world and His final return for judgment. He tells Peter, James, John, and Andrew that this generation will not pass away until all of these things are fulfilled. That means that the generation of Peter, James, John, and Andrew will not die until all of the things that our Lord has prophesied are fulfilled.

Did I miss something here? Peter, James, John, and Andrew are all dead. Their generation is long dead. In spite of that no one has seen the Lord coming on the clouds with much power and glory. Every eye has not seen Him. He has not remade the creation anew. So how can Jesus say that their generation would not pass away before all of those things were fulfilled? Is there a problem with the translation? No. Does it really say all of these things or only some of these things? No it actually says all of these things. What could our Lord possibly be getting at?

Well, one thing that I do notice is that upon our Lord's return the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its shine. That has already happened. It happened on the day of our Lord's death. We call it Good Friday. On Good Friday for about three hours there was darkness over the whole land. The sun did not shine. The moon would not have shined either. Jesus died on that day, obviously He did not come on the clouds with much power and glory on that day, but the day that He comes in much power and glory was fulfilled on that Good Friday so long ago.

Here is what I mean. It has been preached to you by faithful pastors throughout the history of our congregation that Jesus died to take away our sins. In other words the death of Jesus atones for our sins. Because of the atoning death of Jesus God declares that our sins are forgiven. We are justified before God because He declares that our sins are forgiven.

When God declares that our sins are forgiven He is justifying us. Romans 4 teaches us that when God justifies us, He is forgiving us and when He forgives us, He is justifying us. That means that when our Lord dies upon the cross He is justifying us.

Justification is what happens when God who is the righteous judge declares that we are righteous in spite of the fact that we are sinners. God declares that we are righteous because of the atonement that Jesus made when He died. Now justification is the act of God as a judge. That means that justification is a judgment. If God justifies you because Jesus died for you on the cross, then God is making a judgment upon you when Jesus dies on the cross. God has judged you forgiven. God has judged you justified. God has judged you these things not for your sake or for the sake of your accomplishments. If He were doing that He would have to judge us to be sinners. Instead God judges us by the atonement that Jesus accomplished when He died upon the cross. God has judged us not guilty when Jesus died on the cross.

That means that the day on which Jesus died is a judgment day. If God is rendering a judgment on us that justifies us and is doing it because of the death of Jesus, then the death of Jesus is a judgment upon us. It is a judgment that we are not guilty for His sake. If the death of Jesus is a judgment upon us that we are not guilty before God, then the day of Jesus' death is a judgment day. That is to say that it is a day in which God renders judgment.

Now if God Himself justifies you from your sins, then you already know what the attitude of the judge is toward you. Or to put it another way, "How long does the forgiveness God bestows last?" Well since it is God's forgiveness, we have to say, "Forever." If the forgiveness of God lasts forever and you are forgiven because of the death of Jesus, then you already know what the outcome of the Last Day of Judgment will be. You already know that you will make it. You already know that you will receive eternal life. You already know that you will rise from the dead. You already know that on the Last Day Jesus on His great cloud will welcome you into everlasting life.

If you already know this even though it has not happened yet, then the Day of Judgment, the Last Day, is not as big a deal as you may have thought. If you already know what the judge is going to say on the Day of Judgment then the Last Day is already fulfilled even though it has not come yet. And if it is fulfilled even though it did not come yet and it was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross, then it is true that Peter, James, John, and Andrew did see the Son of Man coming with much power and glory with the holy angels. They saw Him crucified and the Last Day was taken care of by that action. It is all finished. The words of Jesus stand fulfilled.

And we wait.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.