

"He Will Come Again - Why Believe?"

"Solar Eclipse will be the beginning of the end of the World." "Pastor warns that astronomical event could herald the day of judgement." "Chance alignment could be sign of the end times." "Friday's Eclipse is likely a message from God to the entire world." These are headlines from Thursday in anticipation of Friday's solar eclipse and once again those predictions were wrong.

Why is there such a fascination, among so many professed Christians with the end of the world? Christ will come again, that's all we need to know. And when he does, to quote one of my favorite bands R.E.M, "It will be the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine!" I know folks might have good intentions with their warnings and their predictions. They want people to be ready. They want people to be saved. But scaring people into believing in Jesus is not the best evangelism tool we can use is it? No, it's not because it turns the entire Christian faith around. Being "saved" is not about the things we do to gain God's favor. Being saved is not about a list of good things we amass over a lifetime for Christ to read when he returns and then decide if we are good enough. No, being saved is about having faith in what Christ did for us. We know this. We talk about it every week. But sometimes I think we forget, especially with all of this end of the world talk.

The truth for all of us is that Christ has promised to come back but he made it very clear that no one will know when. The disciples asked about the last day and his return. And his answer was "no one knows, not even the angels in heaven. Only the Father knows. But he will come again and when he does he will judge the living and the dead. You will either be on his team or you won't. This won't be like one of the times in middle school where we are jumping up and down, raising our hands saying, "pick me, pick me." Nor will it be like the NFL draft where only a select group of the best of the best make it. In this situation the teams will have already been decided. It's not who can get his attention; it's not about who is the best; it's not about second chances. It's all about

faith. But is that really enough, you might be thinking. Yes, because as sinful people, it's all we have to offer. And maybe that's the reason Christ's return seems kind of scary.

Mark's account of Christ's return, which is printed in your bulletin, certainly seems kind of frightening doesn't it? "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. The stars will be falling. And during all this, Jesus will come in the clouds with all of his power and glory and everyone will see him. And he will send out his angels to gather his elect.

So, as we have asked with all of the statements of the creed we confess our belief in each week in our Lenten Sermon series, why believe this? Well, one common theme that has emerged from this series so far, and rightly so, is that we can confidently say we believe this because God's Word is clear about it. There are multiple passages in the New Testament that attest to Jesus coming back again in addition to the one I just read from Mark and I want to share with you one of my favorites.

The writer of Hebrews says this in Chapter 9: "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." It's one of my favorites because it sums up so much about our faith. Christ died once for the sins of all people and he will come again not to deal with sin - that's already been done - but to save those with faith in him. That's comforting isn't it? We simply will be judged as belonging to him. But when talking about Christ's second coming, so many of us like a little more drama don't we?

That's why the passage from Hebrews gets overshadowed by more "dramatic" passages - passages that are not only dramatic but those that make us squirm.

Take Revelation 19 for example where the heavens open and the one clothed in a robe dipped in blood with a sword in his mouth is riding on a white horse accompanied by his army of angels to bring the wrath of God to the nations! That certainly sounds more dramatic and even more judgmental doesn't it? That sounds like we better be ready to fight for our place on the team. Or Matthew 25, "When the son of man comes in his glory and all his angels with him he will gather all the nations and separate the sheep from the goats. To the sheep, he will say, inherit the kingdom, to the goats, he will say depart from me forever!" Yeah, that's right, you better be a sheep or you are done.

True enough. But remember that Christ is coming back to save those with faith in him. This is not something new or separate from everything else we understand about

Christianity. “For is it by grace we have been saved through faith, Paul writes in Ephesians. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and still are justified by his grace as a gift to be received by faith,” he writes in Romans. So Christ’s second coming is just one more affirmation of the Gospel. We always talk about eternal life with Christ don’t we? Well, this is it. Christ, using all of his power, will return and keep us with him for eternity. We shouldn’t be scared. We shouldn’t make this something that it isn’t. We should be confident of this blessed event because we’re on the right team!

But sadly, we can manage to get ourselves off that team before he returns. Even though he has already chosen each and every one of us if we fall away, we’re out. And it’s on us. Maybe that’s another reason why his second coming scares so many of us because falling away from the faith is real.

People give up on Christ. We all know people who have don’t we? Maybe even some of us have given up on him. And while there are a variety of ways we think people are giving up, one of the most blatant ways people do is in the form of unrepentance.

Sure, we all screw up - it’s impossible not to. But when our behavior is repeatedly a violation of God’s will with no concern for the consequences, we are giving up on Christ. When we know something is completely against God’s law but continue to do it over and over again with no regard for our Lord and his sacrifice for all people, we are giving up. But he has not given up on us. So how can we help those who are struggling with a lack of faith? What can we do?

Well, here’s what not to do. Constantly threatening people with the possibility of hell is not helpful. Neither is constantly reminding people of the things Christians are against! But taking the time to talk with others and sharing what our relationship with Christ really means in our lives in light of some of the experiences we have had just might be. Showing people that we are not the judgmental stereotypical folks we are so many times labeled by actually listening and helping where we can to get them through their struggles is helpful.

Because the thing for all of us is that our secure life in Christ is a gift that we sinners don’t deserve. That’s the kind of language we need to be using with those who are falling away. Not condemning, hateful language, But caring, loving language that levels the playing field. Trust me language like “no one deserves the grace of our Lord because we are all miserable failures but through our faith in the one who took all those

failures away, when he comes again, we will be failures no more” is the kind of language that levels the playing field!

And that’s how we should be talking with folks struggling with their faith. People can change. Sometimes they just need hope and when we speak to them, not as those who come across as better than them or judgmental but as those who ourselves are hopeful and humble because of God’s grace, people start to listen.

I remember talking with a friend a few years ago who said he just didn't believe anymore. I listened as he gave me the whole, “I’m a good person,” which should be enough, if in fact this stuff is real. And then I asked him something. I asked him if he was a sinner? He said yes. And I said to him, so am I. Thank God we have a Savior in Jesus Christ because as “good enough” as we think we might be, that’s not enough. That friend, as far as I know, is back on the team. He shared with me that his life is now one of repentance where he recognizes his sins and then turns to God in faith and receives his mercy, which he now understands as the gift of grace.

And what a joy it will be for him who has come back to the faith. What a joy it will be for new believers. And what a joy it will be even for those of us who have always had faith in Christ when he returns. Why? Because when Jesus returns we all will finally see him face to face. His promise will be a reality and we will live with him forever. That’s why we believe. **Amen.**