

Last Sunday Of End Time
Saints Triumphant
November 25, 2012
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Mark 13:24-27

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.’ “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. (NIV)

Have you ever witnessed or known someone with night terrors? They are most common for children between ages 3-12, but they only happen to about 6% or less of all children. There are even a few adults who have suffered from night terrors. Night terrors cause a person to wake up in distress. If you have ever witnessed it usually the child suddenly bolts upright with a look of fear and panic on their face and very often screaming. These night terrors are not only kind of sad and heartbreaking to witness, but also troubling for one who wants a good night of rest.

But it doesn't have to be night terrors because I'm sure we can all relate to times where we have had a tough time sleeping. Have you had one of those nights recently where you toss and turn trying to get comfortable? Maybe you drift off, but then something startles you and you're wide awake. Perhaps you can't get any sleep because you have too many things on your mind, problems you can't stop thinking about, too much to deal with to rest comfortably. But then there are those other nights when you are out as soon as your head hits the pillow. You have no trouble sleeping right through the night. You wake up refreshed and well rested.

Dear friends, today God has some news for us which allows us to sleep well at night. But this news does so much more than give us a good night's sleep! It quiets our guilty consciences. It reassures our troubled souls. God's message for us fills our hearts with peace. We are reminded that although distress and trouble surround us God has made us saints triumphant. So this morning I want all of us whom the Lord calls saints though faith in Christ Jesus to be strengthened and comforted by these words so we may: **Rest Assured!** The good news we will discuss so that we can be rest assured is simply that **this world will end and God will gather His Elect.**

These words follow the time Jesus and his disciples were leaving the temple and one of the disciples turned to Jesus and remarked: **“Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”** To which Jesus replied: **“Do you see all these great building? Not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”** Hearing this Peter, James, John and Andrew ask Jesus privately: **“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”** Our Savior responds with a long discourse on the signs, not just of the destruction of Jerusalem, but signs of the end. After giving the disciples numerous signs of the end of the age, Jesus now turns their attention and ours to the Day of Judgment or the Last Day.

“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.’ After persecutions and wars and natural disasters and false teachings and every other distress Jesus had mentioned, then will come that Day. Jesus did not tell them or us when this Day will

come, but it is coming. And the world will end. Think about it. Sun and moon will cease to function; stars will fall; planets will collapse. They have served their purpose, and the God who made them will shake them. Yes, Jesus makes it very clear that this world in its present form will be destroyed.

So why do we hold on so tightly then to the things of this world? Isn't this kind of foolish? Why do we spend so much time and effort chasing the things of this world? Doesn't seem all that wise, does it? It is alright to look at God's awesome creation like the disciples looked at the magnificent temple and stand in awe and wonder. It is good to even enjoy the blessings of God's creation. But we also need to remember that all these things will perish. The creation itself groans for the day it will be liberated from sinful decay. "***Do not love the world or anything in the world***", Jesus warns. When it comes to this world don't we have to admit we are all too often short-sighted and sinful? We love money and possessions, friends and fame. So Jesus opens his disciples' eyes to the truth. Rest assured this world will end. Notice I said rest assured, not just because it will happen but because it is a good thing that the world will end. For this is a world of sin and distress. There is something waiting for us far better.

"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." On the day the world will end Jesus will come in the clouds – visibly for all to see. In exactly one month now we will celebrate Jesus first coming as a baby humbly born in a stable and laid into a feedbox for animals. Think of even the glory of that night as the angels filled the heavens and the glory of the Lord shone around them. But that is nothing compared to what will accompany Jesus when He comes again. This time Jesus will return with great power and great glory. We might think of some of the greatest powers this world has ever seen. Yet, every worldly power has something or someone to challenge it. But there is not anything that will challenge this power of Christ on the Last Day as every knee will bow and every single tongue must confess that Jesus is Lord. Jesus showed glimpses of His glory before (we might think of the transfiguration), but nothing will be like His glory on the Last Day as He sits on His throne in heavenly glory and all people will stand before Him.

It might be natural to think about the terror of this day for unbelievers. The Bible certainly spends time describing their dread on this Day in other places. However, Jesus' emphasis here is on His disciples. He uses a title He commonly used for Himself, *the Son of Man*. Why does Jesus use this term here? Why, while it is a terror to unbelievers, is this name such a comfort to Christians? Because this Jesus who returns is the same *Son of Man* who came to seek and save the lost, the same *Son of Man* who became the sinners' substitute. This is the *Son of Man* who loved us and gave Himself up for us, the same *Son of Man* who shed His blood on the cross to wash our sins away, the same *Son of Man* who died and rose again to make us saints triumphant. Perhaps this title reminds you of what Jesus said when He was dragged before the Sanhedrin and Caiphas, the high priest, asked Him to confess under oath if He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus answered saying "***I Am,***" and He added: "***But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.***"

And on the Day Jesus makes good on this promise the *Son of Man* will do something else. "***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.***" The harvest will be brought in and the angels will do the gathering! Every child of God, every believer of Jesus, both the living and the dead will be collected. No one will be overlooked, no one will be left out; not a single soul will be forgotten. We can be rest assured that everyone Jesus knew and who knew Jesus by faith will be gathered.

We will be saints triumphant. Jesus speaks these words to comfort His disciples. He speaks these words to strengthen His disciples.

We too need these words of comfort and strength. We need them because for now we remain saints militant. We are still at battle. We are in the time of distress. We are surrounded by false teachings, persecutions, and sufferings of all kinds. We are weary and burdened. We are often weak and restless. We look at the struggles and problems in the church and in our lives and it appears at times the devil and the world have won. This is why Jesus comforts and strengthens us with such words. We need them. We need to view again and again His cross and empty tomb. There He won for us the victory. There all our sins, including our sins of holding on too tightly to the things of this world, have been forgiven. There heaven was opened for us. There God did the work through which we become saints triumphant.

One day, on the day the angels will gather all the elect, we will see clearly just how decisive and complete our victory! We will stand with our Savior in absolute triumph! We will stand again with all our loved ones who are no longer with us because they already fell asleep in Jesus. So sleep well all you saints! Sleep well because in Christ, the Son of Man, your sins have been forgiven and you are at peace with God. Understand that the night terrors, the time of living in this sinful world, the time of great distress will soon be over, and the Day of rest, the Day of God's grace and redemption will come. So if the night troubles us and the days are long, even when our time on earth is up, we can rest assured because we are saints triumphant! Amen.