

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Some disciples *“asked [Jesus], ‘Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?’* Everybody, it seems, wants to know when the end will be, and how shall we know it. And there have been many preachers who have been more than willing to oblige their hearers and give them a date certain. I’ve done a bit of scoffing at a few “date-setters” in the past—for good reason...all those dates have come and gone. And I’m doing a bit of scoffing these days, too, at those who are “shouting their end-of-the-world prophecies” because of current events — and not because the Cubs won the World Series, but because of President-elect Trump’s “historic win on Tuesday.” And without engaging in any of the Schadenfreude that Kevin said he was enjoying, I can pretty much assure you that the election is now past, and even with Trump’s win, there have been no reported sightings of *“the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”*

“When will these things be and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” I’m not going to answer these questions today, at least not with a date-certain, as Jesus did not. Indeed, Jesus said, *“See that you are not led astray”* for Jesus will return *“on a day when [the servant] does not expect him and at an hour he does not know”* (Luke 12:46).

People who preach the end times all the time and focus on the distress of the last days, it seems to me, are trying to frighten you, frighten people into heaven. And, to be sure, there is a reason we should fear God, the one *“who can destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matt. 10:28). We should “fear His wrath and not do anything against” His commandments. On the other hand, we are but poor sinners, so neither knowing the good we should do nor fearing God’s wrath prevent us from breaking God’s commandments and from receiving the punishment deserved because of it.

That’s now how we’re spared God’s righteous punishment, temporal or eternal. Rather, we’re spared of the punishment we deserve by grace, by the death of Him who took all of our punishment upon Himself, *“stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted ... pierced for our transgressions ... crushed for our iniquities ... upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace”* Isaiah 53:4-5. We are *“accounted righteous”* by *“the righteous one,”* Jesus Christ, who bears our iniquities (Isaiah 53:11).

We attain heaven by being accounted righteous by Him who promised and who kept those promises, and who will keep still one more.

Think about that first Gospel promise in the garden, the promise of the seed of woman who would come to crush the serpent's head! Think of the promise to Abraham of the son through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed! Think of the promise to David of a son, the Messianic king, come to establish an everlasting kingdom!

Promises made and promises kept, for come He did, just as He said. Preceded by "*Elijah the prophet*" as Malachi foretold, Jesus came. "*The sun of righteousness [rose] with healing in [His] wings*" (Mal. 4:2), gathering "*children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings*" (Luke 13:34). In Jesus, the "*sunrise [has visited] us from on high [giving] light to those who sit in [the] darkness [of sin] and in the shadow of death, [and guiding] our feet into the way of peace*" (Luke 1:78-79).

But His was not an earthly kingdom; His peace was not among the nations. He came to give peace according to His grace (Luke 2:14), through faith in Him. His is a kingdom of righteousness, revealed in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), established in the weakness and foolishness of His cross (1 Cor. 1), the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Him. Jesus came to establish a kingdom of believers, both Jews and Gentiles, "*a holy nation ... called ... out of darkness into his marvelous light*" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Moreover, Jesus' promises fulfilled did not end with His sacrificial death. Just as promised Jesus also rose again from the dead, as Abraham always knew about his only Son. Our Redeemer does live. His soul would not be abandoned to Sheol; corruption would not visit His holy body (Ps. 16:10). Although the earth would swallow Him, and He would lie in the belly of the earth for three days, yet the earth would vomit Him out again alive—the sign of Jonah. He would come forth victorious over death and the grave. Promises made; promises kept.

But there remains another promise. Jesus promised, "*if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*" And the angels remind us, "*This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*" And in our Gospel, Jesus announces, "*the Son of Man [will come] in a cloud with power and great glory.*" Jesus has shown Himself faithful in the past, though it may have seemed a long time coming. Jesus promises His return, and though it may seem a long time in coming, though it may seem that God is slow in keeping His promises (2 Pet. 3:9), we can count on His promise. Let us not mistake the Lord's patience for a broken promise.

Even when it comes to the signs Jesus shares with the disciples today. These have all been fulfilled, save one: Jesus' return. It really all started with the coming

of Elijah to turn “*the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers,*” that is, with the coming of John the Baptist, and with Jesus’ incarnation. Promises made; promises kept.

And in our Gospel, Jesus tells us: the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed, not “*one stone [left] upon another that will not be thrown down.*” Fulfilled. And Jerusalem, too, “*will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles....*” Fulfilled. In the year of our Lord, A.D. 70, Gentiles—namely, the Roman armies—surrounded Jerusalem, just as Jesus said, and destroyed her, including the temple, and now Muslims have a holy site on the temple mount assuring that the temple will not be rebuilt “*until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*” Of course, that is no problem for Christians, for there is no need of animal sacrifices any more. God now dwells with man in Jesus Himself. The true temple was destroyed in the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world, and this temple was raised back up on the third day. Fulfilled. Fulfilled.

So, too, the other signs Jesus mentions today. “[*W*]ars and tumults ... [*n*]ation ... against nation, ... kingdom against kingdom”? Fulfilled. “[*E*]arthquakes, and ... famines and pestilences”? Fulfilled. Disciples arrested, persecuted, delivered “*up to the synagogues and prisons, and ... brought before kings and governors ... [as an] opportunity to bear witness*” to Jesus. Fulfilled. Hated for Jesus’ sake. Fulfilled. Even “*put to death*” for following and preaching Jesus as Savior. Fulfilled. Promises made; promises kept.

“[*W*]hen will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” The time is now, for the “*things [that] must first take place*” have taken place. But Jesus also says, “*the end will not be at once.*”

And so, we live in a time of watchful waiting. We are living now in the time of the end, but we don’t know the day or the hour. That day will come suddenly and unexpectedly like a thief.

So we wait. And while we wait, what shall we do? Let us be about the tasks that the Lord has given us to do, living lives of godliness and holiness, not growing weary in doing good, not taken up in idleness, but devoting ourselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the Holy Communion, being strengthened in our waiting for the distress and perplexity that is sure to come. And “*don’t be terrified,*” but look for every “*opportunity to bear witness,*” trusting in the Lord’s promises to walk with you in dark times and to give you “*a mouth and wisdom.*”

And when that last promise is finally fulfilled, and the “*Son of Man [comes] in a cloud with power and great glory,*” don’t be filled with fear and foreboding. Don’t duck when you hear the voice of an archangel and the sound of the trumpet

of God. Don't be frightened. You are not frightened into heaven. On that day of Jesus' return, that day that is surely drawing near, O you saints who look to Jesus and feast on Him, who trust His promises made and promises kept: "*straighten up and raise your heads.*" Leap for joy like calves released from a stall, "*because your redemption*" has just drawn near.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.