

Keep Your Eyes on the Sky!

I was once able to visit the World Trade Center towers in New York city, the buildings that were destroyed by terrorists on 9/11 in 2001. When I stood on the sidewalk in front of them, I couldn't really see the top. The inside lobby was cavernous, like a huge shopping mall. The view from the roof was spectacular. It is still hard for me to comprehend that those amazing towers are gone. In the beginning of Mark 13, Jesus' disciples commented on how amazing the temple was. The temple and the surrounding courtyard covered 36 acres. Some of the foundation stones were over 40' x 15' x 15' and weighed up to 600 tons. The gate leading to the inner part of the temple had doors that were each 7 ½' wide and 30' high, covered with bronze. It took 20 men to open each door. There were gold and silver decorations all over the place. No wonder the disciples commented on how magnificent it looked. Jesus shocked them, though, when he told them that the temple would be completely destroyed. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD was a symbol of Judgement Day that is coming. The destruction of the temple was also the first in a series of events that would signal the coming of Judgment Day. Jesus was teaching his disciples, and us, not to get too excited or attached to the things on this earth. Everything in the world will be burned up. Instead, we should keep our focus on him as our Savior who was coming to take us to heaven. He encourages us to keep your eyes on the sky.

Waiting while eager

Jesus described what would happen on Judgment Day (:26), **“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”** Other sections of the Bible complete the scene. Trumpets will blare so loudly that everyone in the world will hear them. The sky will explode with God's glory that will make a nuclear blast seem like a pop gun. Everyone in the world will see him. Angels will swoop down from the sky. Every cemetery will be emptied as bodies and souls are joined together again. I was once taking someone new to the faith through membership classes. When we covered all this, he let loose with a loud, “Whoa!” It should impress us as well. We need to be aware of it.

We look forward to seeing Jesus in all his glory and being in heaven where everything will be perfect. Not everything in life is perfect now. In fact, quite a few things are pretty bad. When we look around us, we see

sadness and sorrow, depression and despair, wars and rumors of wars, diseases and disabilities. We look in the mirror and see someone who is growing older, someone often tired someone who often feels overwhelmed and inadequate. We see prices going higher and our savings accounts going lower. We see crooks getting away with crimes and honest people suffering and struggling. That's what we see when we look at this world. Jesus wants us to keep our eyes on the skies.

Jesus explained that all of the miserable things in our world are signs, or reminders, that the world as we know it is coming to an end. Earlier in chapter 13, Jesus described all these issues as birth pains. According to my survey, no mother has ever enjoyed birth pains. They call it “labor” for a reason. But the birth pains mean that a baby is coming soon! In verse 28, Jesus explained that when you see a tree sprouting leaves, you know that summer is coming. All the things going on in our world let us know that Jesus is coming. He said that, **“he is near, right at the door.”** He also said that this **“this generation”** will not pass away until everything has happened. Understand **“this generation”** to refer to the type of people who dominated the world, the unbelievers. There will be hardships and unbelievers in this world until the end of time. But, Jesus IS coming. Keep your eyes on the sky.

A few years ago, Aaron Golden married his high school sweetheart, Heather. Aaron was a sergeant in the Army, and two months after their wedding, he received orders to be deployed. He spent four months in special training and then a year overseas in Iraq. How eager do you think Heather was for Aaron to come home? When they met in the airport, they hugged for over 5 minutes. She was thrilled that her bridegroom had come home to her.

Jesus is your heavenly bridegroom. You were joined, or married, to him when you were baptized. Your lives were joined. BUT, Jesus has gone away for a long time. He told us that he is coming again to take us home to heaven, but we wait and wait and wait and wait. Just as Heather was eager to see her bridegroom, we are eager to see Jesus coming for us. As we keep our eyes on the sky, we will wait with eagerness. Soon, according to God's time schedule, we will be free from all the troubles and trials of this world and be happy forever in heaven.

Watching while prepared

While we eagerly wait, we will also watch and make sure that we are prepared. Jesus pounds this point home most emphatically as he says (:33),

“Be on guard! Be alert and pray.” (:37) Watch!” He describes the owner of an estate who tells his workers that he’s going to be gone for a while, but doesn’t tell them when he’s coming back. Whenever he returns, he expects them to be doing their jobs. He could come back at any time – in the evening, at midnight, at dawn. They need to be ready. We, also, need to be prepared for when Jesus returns.

The thought of being judged for all the things that we have done and have not done sounds excruciatingly painful. We don’t want anyone to judge our life and see the terrible things we’ve done, or hear the awful things we’ve said, or know the selfish and shameful thoughts that have gone through our minds. God’s standard of judgment is not about being pretty good or mostly good. It’s not about being outwardly better than others. It’s not even about getting better and better as life goes on. No, God’s standard of judgment is perfection. Either you are perfect, or you are not.

Since no one can live up to that standard, God surprisingly and unexpectedly announce a plan. His Son, Jesus Christ, came into the world and lived perfectly. He kept every standard God set. He never failed or faltered. He is perfect. More than that, Jesus faced God’s judgment for every sin on the cross. His sacrifice satisfied the wrath of God for humanity’s imperfection and sin. Because of Jesus, all of your sins are washed away. You are already forgiven. Because of Jesus, you are made pure and holy. When God the Judge looks at you, it’s just as if you never sinned.

One of the most famous stories ever written is “Dr. Faustus.” It has been told and retold and adapted for over 500 years. Dr. Faustus makes a deal with the devil. He would be rich and famous throughout his life, but in the end, the devil would get his soul forever in hell. Dr. Faustus enjoys fame and fortune throughout his life, but the older he gets, the more his conscience troubles him and the more afraid he gets of death and the devil. He does everything he can to avoid the inevitable, but finally ends up in hell.

In one version of Dr. Faustus that I read, he thought he would outsmart the devil by always having a Bible with him – sort of like holding a cross to keep Dracula away – how silly. Then one day, a man came into his office. It was the devil in disguise. When Dr. Faustus realized it was the devil, his Bible was just out of reach. The devil got him. Judgment Day will be an instantaneous moment. You will not have a chance to say, “I’m sorry, Jesus. I repent.” You will either be prepared or you won’t. We do not know when Jesus will return. Not even the angels or Jesus, according

to his human nature, knew when the end would come. Having a Bible in your hand is not what makes you prepared for Judgment Day. Being prepared means having faith in your heart. God made you ready for Judgment Day when he brought you to faith. When Jesus returns, like the owner of the estate returning, he WILL find you doing what you were supposed to do – trusting in him and putting your faith into practice no matter what your vocation in life is. No matter where God has placed you in life and no matter what he has given you to do, show the Lord how much your salvation means to you by holding on to him in faith and living your faith.

Jesus explained (:31), **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”** God will keep all of his promises to you.

- He promised that he would never leave you or forsake you.
- He promised that he will always forgive you.
- He promised that he will hear and answer your prayers.
- He promised that he will send his angels to guard you.
- He promised that he will work out all things for your eventual and eternal good.
- He promised that he is preparing a place for you by his side in heaven.
- He promised that he will come again to this earth to take you home to heaven.

There’s nothing to be afraid of. You do not need to be afraid of Judgment Day. We will eagerly watch for Jesus to return because we know that he made us prepared for Judgment Day through faith.

Maybe you’ve heard me tell the story about the Christian man who, every night when he pulled his shades shut, would look up to the sky and pray, “Tonight, Lord? Tonight?” Then, every morning when he opened his shades, would look up to the sky and pray, “Today, Lord? Today?” He was keeping his eyes on the sky. He was eagerly waiting and watching for Jesus to come and take him home. He was always expecting Jesus to come. He was always prepared. The Lord promises to continue to strengthen your faith through Word and Sacrament so that, just like that fellow, you are always prepared for Jesus to come back to earth his second and final time and take you home to heaven. Until then, wait and watch and keep our eyes on the sky. Amen.