

The Coming of the Son of Man

The gospel for this coming Sunday (First Sunday in Advent) is Mark 13:24-37. This text has three sections. All of them focus on Jesus' second coming.

This section of Mark's Gospel is the end of a longer discourse from Jesus given to his disciples after they left the temple. They remarked on the beautiful buildings and stones, which prompted Jesus to warn them of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Many try to use these verses to construct predictions of when Jesus' return will be. Jesus answers the question of when, not by telling the disciples times or definitive signs to prove the date, but rather by telling them what to do when they encounter certain situations. When you hear . . . do not be alarmed (13:5-8). When they bring you to trial . . . do not be anxious (13:9-13). When you see . . . let those who are in Judea flee (13:14-23). These do not answer the question of when Jesus will return. Any effort to twist them to that purpose is futile.

The "but" in verse 24 dissociates the destruction of Jerusalem from the end of the world. The striking of the sun and moon and stars in Israel's history is connected with the Lord humiliating the foreign "gods" the heathen trust.

The fig tree, common in the Holy Land, begins to swell along the stem before its leaves start to bud, alerting observers to the coming of summer, the joyous and fruitful time.

The signs are not intended to frighten Christians, but to heighten our anticipation and motivate continued faithfulness.

During this Advent season Jesus' encourages us to "be on guard and be alert. These words relay a sense of urgency in this text. The force of these imperatives is not an admonition to strain one's neck to see into the future. Rather, it is an encouragement to look diligently into the Word, which will never pass away (Mk 13:31). One who watches for Christ there is ready. Present action and future bliss will surely follow.

Rather than wasting time and energy trying to determine the exact year or day of Jesus' return, which God has not revealed, we should focus on bringing the Gospel to people who do not know Christ as Savior and Lord.

Jesus' promise "my words will never pass away" are going to be good for all our days. We can always depend on God's Word.

Prayer: Set my heart, O Savior, on the life and hope above, so that shadows of this world may not darken my sight. Amen. (TLSB)