

Text: Mark 13:5-11 (End Time 1 [Reformation], November 4, 2018)

Theme: Through our Savior's Eyes!

Virtue (basic truth): Our Mighty Fortress sees and shares the hard road to eternal joy.

Malady (our problem): Sinners' focus gets distracted by worries along the way to heaven.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of Grace refocuses faith on the Savior in a way that sees the joy of eternity through his eyes and is strengthened for the journey.

Propositional Statement (aim): *See it through my eyes.* The importance of a proper vantage point is near immediate. Spiritually and eternally, too. Through the world's eyes, it's easy to lose heart. But, *through our Savior's eyes*, hearts rejoice as his day draws near.

Specific Law in Text: "Watch out . . . be on your guard" (Mark 13:5, 9).

Specific Gospel in Text: "do not worry beforehand what to say" (Mark 13:11).

Doctrinal Thought: the birth-pains evident in our world will usher in new life with Christ!

Sanctification Thought: *"Loving Savior, in grace unparalleled and love undeserved, you came to serve us, save us, sympathize with us. Friend, thank you! By your Word of promise, dispel my worry over today. By your Word of grace, redirect my focus on you. By your Word of power, equip and embolden me to stand firm – through all things on your Word – until I stand with you in glory. In your name I am blessed and bold to pray. Amen!"*

Mark 13:5-11

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues.

On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

“The gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1:1) still this: by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, you are forgiven and free. To God alone the glory. Alleluia and Amen!

Sometimes we just need others to see things the way we do. It’s not that we triumph our vantage point or that we need our perspective to predominate or even that our opinion has to outshine all others. Nor is it even that we see things so much more vibrantly than anyone else (although, that usually is what we’re getting after). But, for the sake of mutual understanding, sometimes we simply summon the sentence: *just see it through my eyes*. Don’t have to agree, but you might.

In so many facets of our lives, it really is important to see things through someone else’s eyes. And the concept of *church* is not disconnected from that conversation. So, just for a minute, see the disciples’ church through their eyes – it’s

stunning! Sure, not nearly as opulent as Solomon’s, but Herod had the architectural title “the great” for a reason – and the Temple area was testimony. Transcendent atmosphere. Huge stones. Towering columns. Courts. Gates. Pools. Narthexes. Throngs. Choirs. Every concept of *church* imaginable on an impressive



level. No wonder Jesus’ disciples – who grew up going to that church! – walked through it with their Rabbi and remarked, “*What massive stones! What magnificent buildings*” (Mark 13:1)!

And part of us sees atmospheric opulence and agrees; that’s what church should be and look like. Start the narthex project now! To be church, to do church, we have to recreate *that*! Do we?

Fast forward 1500 years. Temples renamed *cathedrals* are as architecturally transcendent; massive structures ornamented with silver and gold. People. Choirs. Courts. Cloisters, even. But their accompanist is a vain exercise of rites and rituals. Entirely different culture than the disciples’; but *church* through the Reformer’s eyes isn’t so glorious, either. Church-going sinners and strugglers were equally blind to what God himself considered magnificent and meaningful. See *church* through those eyes, and obviously something needs to change.

Similar today. Blinded by culture’s definition of *church* and redefinition of a *successful church*, a sinful slice of us is captivated by max capacity auditoriums with single-origin coffee; that wants that popularity injected into what we are; that craves physical, numerical, and structural success as the world defines. If we can just recreate that, church would be right again! Right?!

But here’s the question: do those church concepts see and define church through our eyes, or through Jesus’? In other words, are we the ones telling him how his church should be; or are we simply humbled to hear to his voice at what he deems important and dares to bless?

Unsettling as it may seem, let your inner heart wrestle with that quandary well into the week ahead. But let's start with the prayer that, as God speaks to our hearts with this section from Mark 13, he blesses us with a bright vision that sees all things *through our Savior's eyes*.

Read the account already and I gave you a skoash of context in terms of the disciples' impression. Let's summarize and respect that Jesus' words of warning are 4-fold and factual:

- 1) Don't be misled by a different "*I, I Am*" claim (Mark 13:6). Don't follow a different shepherd, look to a different light, dance with a different "the truth." Pay attention.
- 2) Don't be startled by the difficulty you hear on the news or by travesties that hit home.
- 3) Don't panic with uncertainty.
- 4) Don't worry about what to say when you get put on trial on account of me.

Each of those warnings is very real, very urgent and very much meant for all. Real as warnings are, most stunning to me is that you responded to them with "*praise be to you, O Christ!*"

"*Praise be to you, O Christ!*" It's easy to say in a comfortable church and when it's bolded in the booklet. But how often doesn't our praise go mute when the struggle is real and the travesty is close. But how different Jesus' words would be if he actually saw things through our eyes – if he saw what we see, watched the news we do, read the articles we do! Then he'd relate; he'd understand how hard this is! If he saw things through our eyes, he'd know what it's like not to fit in to the culture. He'd rethink teachings that come across unloving and intolerant. He'd get that sometimes the Word just has to bend and be muffled for a minute – or at least be blurred for ecumenical relations. Then he'd know how hard it is to adhere to what he says when faithfulness splits families. If he actually saw church through our eyes, maybe he'd even sympathize with how weak it appears; come up with better ways to do it so more would appreciate it; and, if he actually took the time, maybe he'd even appreciate massive structures and magnificent steeples!

Christians, before we get carried away in our rant – massive and magnificent though we deem it – remember that he does; he does see things through human eyes. Remember, as True God and True Man, he came to serve us, to save us, to sympathize with us. So, yes, he sees; and, yes, he knows what it's like to be ridiculed for his Word. He understands what it's like to hold to hard teachings. He absolutely relates to our heart-aches and home-schisms. He lived in the same, sinful culture; he got it: even church through his eyes doesn't equate to a life of glory and a life of ease here, to a successful appearance or level of popularity here. But that's exactly why he speaks in grace and acts in grace, to hold the prize of heaven on our hearts and before our eyes!

Anyone remember what I said that prompted your “*praise be to you, O Christ*” response? “*This is the Gospel of our Lord.*” And it is! Because even though these words seem bleak, they breathe the good news of *God-for-us* in every way. His 4-fold warning holds 4-fold favor, too!

- 1) Never forget who speaks these words . . . or when. The Breath that breathes them is still Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on the same week his culture killed him. It’s Jesus, the Priest who offered his life as a sacrifice for all sins; the King who reigns in triumphant and eternal love; Prophet who spoke God’s Word then and speaks it still for all to hear.
- 2) “*On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations*” (Mark 13:9, 10). Before we hesitate “on account of him,” rejoice, rejoice, in what he did “on account of the world” for you!
- 3) Even through all *this* . . . he’s never distant; no need to worry! In fact, the One who is with us always, even here, promises to send his Spirit for our comfort. And he does.
- 4) *Through our Savior’s eyes*, we see the goal, too! We cringe at war-words, stress-signs, discomfort, uncertainty and pain; we shudder at birth-pains. “*Though [they] indicate the end, they are not the end itself*” (Wenzel, 617). Grace alone, birth pain ends in new life.

And so, so graciously, that’s what the Savior promises, because that’s what we need! A world so broken and lives so shattered – do we really need max-capacity cathedrals and single-origin coffee? A heart so bothered and a home-life so bleak – do we really need things draped in silver and gold? An earth that looks worse every day – do we really need massive stones?

No. We need Jesus. We need the Savior – and his gospel of forgiveness to our broken world and shattered lives. We need assurance he hasn’t left us, and he never will – and that in him we are a new creation. We need the Gospel – to bring us through the pain and fix our eyes again on the Author and Perfecter of our faith, on Jesus, and the eternity he won for us. We need his grace – to refocus our sin-battling, sin-battered hearts on the forgiveness he fully gives freely.

What if we saw church – his church – *through our Savior’s eyes*? What if, dear friends, we looked past the massive structures and magnificent steeples; the max capacities and single-origin coffees to what we truly need? If we did; better: when we do, then we see *through our Savior’s eyes*, then we see what our Savior sees! The joy of the gospel and the prize of eternity laid for us in his dear Word. When we do, dear friends, with the Reformer and with grace-knowers of all time, then we see the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And, Scripture alone makes it clear: we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Of course, then, to God alone be the glory! Alleluia and Amen!