



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

January 27, 2019

"The Return of Jesus" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

Pastor Dan Chun

Mark 13:26-37 *Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then He will send out the angels, and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that He is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else He may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.*

"Keep awake! Keep awake!" says the Lord. Especially when Dan is preaching – keep awake! Actually, Jesus is saying to keep awake because He is coming back. Get Ready! Live a life as if He could come today. At that time, may our hands be on the plough, doing His work, living a life for Him.

I have never preached on this passage of Scripture, but it's a good thing we are going to delve into it today as it is pretty clear we need to keep awake to hear what Jesus is saying.

It's Judgment Day!

There are two schools of thought on this passage. Chris gave a great sermon last week that began talking about this.

Some say Jesus is talking about the Destruction of Jerusalem which happened in 70 AD. Others think He is also talking about the return of Jesus from heaven since He says He is coming in the clouds. And that is what we are going to look at today.

What do we do with the Return of Jesus? He said He would be coming back. Would

you hazard a guess how many times His return is mentioned in the New Testament in the Bible?

His return is mentioned 300 times! That's one out of every 13 verses! So, you shouldn't ignore its importance. Keep awake!

For some it's good news-bad news. Some say, "The good news is that Jesus is coming back and the bad news is that He is really upset!"

Well, Jesus being upset is one way to look at it, but that is not necessarily right. I hope, by the end, we will see how this passage can be helpful and not hurtful.

However, it would not be hard to see how Jesus would return and see how His heart might ache and He might not be happy with what He sees.

He sees a world that always has a war going on somewhere.

He sees an earth that humans have taken for granted. We have severely polluted the air, water, and land with our waste products and industries.

In Los Angeles, for instance, where there's a constant haze of polluted air or a place like Beijing when I last visited it. We could barely see 20 yards ahead while driving.

Jesus looks around and finds other things that break His heart.

He sees the MORAL pollution of the world.

He sees child molestation in every country.

He sees the multi-billion dollar pornography industry that preys on children and adults.

He sees sex trafficking, not just in foreign countries like Cambodia and Thailand, but also right here in Hawaii where it is sadly highly profitable.

He sees and grieves that sexual harassment has prompted movements like #MeToo and #Timesup. He sees prejudice, racial and gender inequality.

He sees the needless suffering of animals when they are used for entertainment, like hunting and circuses, or when like ducks are force-fed just so we can expand and destroy their livers so we can have a tasty paste called foie gras.

Jesus looks around and sees the widespread use of meth, opioids, and ecstasy that people substitute for real happiness.

He sees institutions that are not built on public service, but rather on pride, greed or desire for power.

He sees businesses that thrive on the love of money, the root of all evil.

But this is not a sermon on "let's all feel guilty because we are about to be brought into the principal's office."

Nor should we want to avoid this topic so our lives will not be in alignment with Him.

So what is this passage about?

First of all, the passage says

We don't know when Jesus is returning.

As Chris said last week, Jesus says even He doesn't know; only the Heavenly Father knows when.

If you ever hear people giving a countdown because they know the exact date Jesus is coming back, they are so wrong!

Jesus said no one will know.

But it also means we need to keep awake.

Which leads to the second point:

We should think about Jesus' return, but not get obsessed.

I like what C.S. Lewis wrote about the second coming of Christ in his essay, *The World's Last Night*. He said we should be like a sentry, always ready, in case the enemy attacks, always ready in case his commanding

officer should drop by unexpectedly for an inspection. But it shouldn't be a paranoid fear.

Lewis said it's more like how an 80-year old man should not always daily think about the possibility of his death, but yes, he needs to take that reality into account. So he makes a will, and maybe he tries to make sure he has offered forgiveness or received forgiveness from people.

There has to be a balance held in tension between seriously thinking "I could die tomorrow" and not thinking about it all the time.

Even young adults should be buying life insurance because they might die. Do they obsess about death? No, but they need to think about that, especially if married and with kids.

We live in the tension of needing to think about death, but not over-think it every day.

Hence, we need to live focused on knowing that Jesus is coming back. Keep awake, but balance that with not being overly concerned about it every day.

However, I would surmise that most of us in this room have hardly at all thought about the return of Jesus. Zero on the meter might mean I never think about it, and 100 means I think about it all the time. Maybe the needle on our faith meter needs to go towards that direction of knowing and thinking about what did Jesus mean that He is coming back. How would that shape my life?

Why don't we think about it?

I dare say for some it is because their suffering has not been great.

Friends of mine who have friends in Rwanda who have loved ones murdered because of a past oppressive regime, those Rwandan friends often say "this earth is not my home." They look forward to Jesus returning.

They long for a place where their suffering, their poverty, and the pain of losing their loved ones would end.

African-Americans in this country suffered tremendous racial prejudice and still do. It's hard to believe that it was not until the mid-1960's that African-Americans obtained the right to vote or live where they want.

Incredibly, our American government had previously blocked that right for African-Americans to vote, as well as the right to eat in all restaurants or swim in public swimming pools or use public bathrooms or sit on a bus or rent or own a home where they wanted to. Youth, Millennials, people: know your US History.

If you have seen the recent movie *BlacKkKlansman* or *The Green Book*, you know what I mean.

If you have studied American History you should know what I mean.

But there was a shining light in that moment of darkness.

For many African-Americans, it was the Church that was the center of their family because it gave them hope in Jesus and, if things didn't get better in this world, their faith gave them courage and they knew that someday Jesus would return and right every wrong.

We just remembered and celebrated the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. last weekend.

In his classic, famous speech, "I Have A Dream," King spoke of a time when, hopefully, this world would bring justice and freedom to all people in this land in the midst of tremendous suffering of the African-Americans.

Let's take a look at a short piece of that speech.

*I have a dream today.
I have a dream that one day
every valley shall be exalted,
every hill and mountain shall be
made low, the rough places will
be made plain, and the crooked
places will be made straight, and
the glory of the Lord shall be
revealed, and all flesh shall see it
together.*

*This is our hope. This is the
faith that I go back to the South
with. With this faith we will be
able to hew out of the mountain
of despair a stone of hope. With
this faith we will be able to
transform the jangling discords of
our nation into a beautiful
symphony of brotherhood. With
this faith we will be able to work
together, to pray together, to
struggle together, to go to jail
together, to stand up for freedom*

*together, knowing that we will be
free one day.*

*This will be the day when all
of God's children will be able to
sing with a new meaning, "My
country, 'tis of Thee, sweet land
of liberty, of Thee I sing. Land
where my fathers died, land of
the pilgrim's pride, from every
mountainside, let freedom ring."*

It was the Church that was the backbone of much of the African-American community. Martin Luther King, Jr., was with the Southern CHRISTIAN Leadership Conference.

He believed that God would give them the strength for today and a hope that when Jesus returns, all things wrong will be made right.

Did you hear King say it clearly in his speech of where his hope came from and how it was dripping with Biblical imagery? He said: "I have a dream that one day, every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with."

When you have suffered greatly and injustice thrives where you are, you do want to know that someday Jesus is coming back to make crooked things straight.

And on that day, all the bad guys will be taken care of. All of the injustice will end.

If you think about it, don't we want a faith that believes in the end, all will be made right?

Yes, it may not be in our lifetime, but to know that in the final chapter all will be made right has got to be the basis of our optimism and the basis of our passion and endurance to do good in this world even when all the odds seem against us.

For those who are fighting evil, for those who are trying to make good happen, I say to you "keep on keepin' on!" Don't give up. Never give up.

Abraham never saw the nation he was to birth. Moses didn't get to the Promised Land. David never got to see the Temple built. The apostle Paul never got to see the church growth we have today.

But they kept going on till their last day, not knowing when Jesus would return, but keeping awake and faithful.

If we know that in the final chapter everything turns out okay, then we have hope.

When our loved ones die, we can have hope they are taken care of in heaven because of Jesus alone.

When we fight injustice we don't give up.

Again, I recall in Martin Luther King's very last speech these powerful words of the need to keep on keepin on even though you don't see the end.

He said this on April 3, 1968, at the Church of God in Christ headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee. Tragically, the next day, he was assassinated. Listen to his speech in that context. Here is what King said, almost in a prophetic sense.

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place, but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will.

And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!

That's our passage—that someday we will see the glory of the coming of the Lord and, in the mean time, may we be faithful and show His love and justice to all.

King was trying to restore hope to those who were beaten down fighting racial injustice.

We need to know that some day things can get better, not

because of Martin Luther King, but the King of Kings will come.

He has come and will come again in tremendous power.

The first time He came, He told us that He would always be present through His Holy Spirit and He will help us and heal us even before He returns.

That is why we have a Healing Service today. Jesus plans to heal people today as He did in the first century. That's our present day hope.

And for our long-term hope for all of our attempting to make this a better world for ourselves and others, as I have mentioned before that as Christians we fight like World War II resistance fighters in France against the Nazis who believed that though they were outnumbered and ill-equipped and may die, one day—yes, one day—far off across the seas....

They had faith that a General would come with a great armada of ships and a sky full of planes coming in the clouds, bringing reinforcements, human angels parachuting down, soldiers, landing on their beaches, to come to fight the Nazis and right every wrong and save the people the Allies came to save.

Or in Biblical terms:

Mark 13:26-27 *Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then He will send out the angels, and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

The French Resistance Fighters believed this in World War II:

Someda...someday...we heard stories.rumors about it... someday...and we hope with all of our hearts and souls and minds, though knowing we ourselves might not make it to see it...someday our loved ones, our homes will be visited by a General who will make things right.

And, as it turned out, one day, June 6, 1944, in Normandy, France, from some unseen place many miles away in the distance, the ships, the planes, the soldiers arrived because a four-star general, Dwight Eisenhower, sent them.

They would be now present in France fighting with them.

Present.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, does not mention a 4-star general, but it quotes Jesus saying, "It is I, Jesus—The Bright Morning Star." (Rev. 22:16)

15 times, the New Testament uses a special word in describing that Jesus is coming again. The word for that in Greek is:

Parousia = Presence

Parousia, which means presence.

Jesus will again be present in person.

When Jesus comes, it will be the ultimate presence. The ultimate Light of the World to come to knock out the darkness.

Now here's a take-away question that you can talk about in your Sunday lunch today or in your small group:

When you hear that Jesus is coming back, what do you feel?

A gut check: Are you happy? Joyful? Celebrative?

Or are you fearful? Oh no! Is Jesus going to say, (to tune of Santa Claus Is Coming to Town):

*You better watch out;
You better not cry;
You better not pout;
I'm telling you why.
Jesus Christ is coming...
to town!*

*He's making a list;
He's checking it twice;
He's gonna find out
whose naughty or nice.
Jesus Christ is coming...
to town!*

*For some there is fear.
Oh there He is in the air!
Will He be kind?
Will He be fair?
Jesus Christ is coming...
to town.*

*Will He say I haven't
done enough?*

We might think: Oh, no, Jesus is coming back? It's worse than lions, and tigers and bears, oh my!

What will you feel when He comes might be an indicator of where you are spiritually.

What is Jesus going to be like when that judgement day comes?

Since Jesus comes in the last days, let's take a look at the last book of the Bible called Revelation (not Revelations as some people say, but Revelation—singular).

We see that the author of Revelation says that, when he looked at heaven in a vision, he saw a throne of judgement, and He saw a Lamb on it. A Lamb is sitting on the throne of judgment.

The Lamb is Jesus. A lamb is a gentle creature. Jesus sometimes is portrayed as a Lion, as the Lion of Judah, as we sang or will sing today that Jesus is the Lion who fights for us and His roar can still the greatest enemy. But as the Judge on the throne, who will come to earth on the Last Day, we see a Lamb.

Why? Because when Jesus was here on earth the first time, He came to a Jewish culture that had thousands of rules to follow supposedly to win God's favor and thousands of rules so that they wouldn't sin.

It was a culture where they would kill an innocent lamb to atone for their sin.

When Jesus came to earth, He was described by the prophet John the Baptist as the Lamb of God.

He came to be the sacrificial lamb who would give up His life to take care of all of our sin, so that that there was nothing we could ever do—no perfection or performance needed—because there was nothing we could do to win God's love.

Because what was needed to remove our sin was already done. Jesus died for our sin.

It's like a judge in a courtroom who sentences you for a crime to go to a death sentence, who then says, "I will go to the gallows for you. I will take your place." Then he walks from behind to the bench and goes up to you, gives you a hug, and then is shackled and taken away to jail.

And you say, "No, that's crazy! You can't do that."

And Jesus the judge says, "I will because I love you."

And that's the essence of the Christian faith: Jesus loves us that much.

And so when Jesus returns, He returns as the Lamb of God who has already taken care of your procrastination, your sin, your laziness of not having done enough good, your crimes of the heart.

Everything has been done for you.

All Jesus wants you to do is accept what He has done for you.

You see, in this world, when we realize what Jesus the Lamb has done, we will want to receive His pardon and then love others as He loved us and follow this loving Judge who is the Lion and the Lamb.

Do we keep on wanting to fight evil in this world and do

good? Yes, not because we have to, but because we want to.

It's not a transactional relationship that, if I do more good works, then Jesus will love me more when He returns. He loves us as we are. And He has already given us the greatest gift—His life.

Yes He is the judge, but the judge who, when He sees us, give us a hug as He puts his scarred body and arms with wrists with nail holes in them which shows that there is nothing we can do to earn His love. He has already given His full love to us.

To become a Christian—a follower of Jesus—all it means is to receive His love.

In the last days and out of that is a whole new experience due to the Parousia, presence of God.

Keep awake for God's presence in your life.

To do a paraphrase of our passage today, Jesus is saying heaven and earth may pass away, but My love will never pass away.

Keep awake.

Keep the faith.

Look for Me. Follow Me. For I am coming back.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org
The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com