

## Look! His Angels Gather His Elect! – Mark 13:24-27

For the past few weeks, we have been in the season of the church year called End Time where we look ahead to the Last Day and what it means for Christians. Today's verses from the Gospel of Mark point us directly at the Last Day and what will happen after God judges all people. After a final period of intense persecution and demonic activity, **“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; [and] the stars will fall from the sky.”** There will be signs in the sky so clear that no one will miss them. Can you imagine how you would react if you were to see these happen? When there's an eclipse, we mark it on our calendars and change our schedules so we can see it! But to see all these lights in the sky going out without warning? Mark goes on to say that **“the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”** It will be clear to all that the very pillars and foundations of this world will be all shook up on the Last Day because Jesus, the Son of Man, will be coming back.

Mark tells us that when Jesus comes, all people will see him coming in clouds with great power and glory with all his angels. Picture that in your mind. Your eyes are lifted up to the skies and you see how dark it is. And as you stand there, wondering what happened to the sun, moon, and stars, you see some clouds coming closer. Surrounding the clouds are angels flitting about waiting for Jesus' command to go out and gather the elect. And there, within the clouds, you see the hazy figure of a man beaming with power and glory. As he gets closer you make him out to be Jesus – the Son of Man.

And then you remember what the angels said to the disciples at Jesus' ascension – **“Men of Galilee...why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”** As Jesus ascended into the clouds above, so he will descend with the clouds. But more than this, Jesus will come back as the Son of Man described in the Old Testament prophet Daniel's vision of the Last Day. In chapter 7, Daniel writes **“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven....He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”** My brothers and sisters, when our Lord comes again everyone will know it. Everyone will see the lights go out in the skies as Christ comes with great power and glory. And it is then that he will sound the trumpet, as

Matthew tells us in his account of the Last Day, and will send his angels out to gather his elect – his children – from all corners of the world.

If the Last Day were to happen in our lifetimes, which it very well could, how would you react when you see all this? What would terrify you more? The sun, moon, and stars going out, or Jesus' coming with all his power? I'm guessing it would be Jesus. Because as I picture Jesus' coming in the clouds, I know how quickly my guilty conscience would accuse me. How did you talk about the candidates this past election cycle? Not just Clinton and Trump, but also the local elections? Between all the mudslinging and partisanship, how quickly it is that we break the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. Rather than protect and build up our neighbor's good name and reputation even if they don't deserve it, we trash it so we can get what we want. Rather than take their words and actions in the kindest possible way, we twist them and latch onto a few sound bites to misrepresent them! There's a reason why Clinton, Trump, and President Obama encouraged us to listen to each other rather than keep tearing each other apart.

When we picture Jesus' coming in the clouds, how our guilty consciences remind us how we have misused the blessings God has given! We don't treat our bodies as the temples they are for the Holy Spirit. Our thoughts quickly wander to greed, lust, anger, and trust in the things of this world than in our God alone. We remember how true Jesus' words are in Matthew chapter 6 – **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** How easily we spend our money on the perishing treasures of this world than in thankful offerings for the eternal treasures of heaven.

When we picture Jesus coming in the clouds and sending out his angels to gather his elect, will they come to gather you? Or will they pass over you to gather someone more righteous? My guilty conscience tells me “No.” My sinful life confirms it. And God's Word shows me how much I fail to live up to the law. Indeed, left to ourselves, the sun, moon, and stars going out are nothing to be concerned about. Because all we can think about is how the angels will leave us behind.

But you know what? The angels will come for you and gather you home to heaven on the Last Day. And it's not because of what you have chosen to do. It's because of what God has chosen. And to show all of this, it comes down to the word “election.” The Greek word for “election” can also be translated as “chosen” and is often synonymous for each other. And it's the same in our language today. What is it we do when we elect someone for office? We choose the person we

want. When Donald Trump was elected to be president, the American people chose him to be president. In the same way, when we talk about God's elect, we are talking about the people he chooses. They are his children who believe in his promises.

Do you have faith in Jesus as your Savior? Do you believe that when Jesus died on the cross he died for you? If your answer is "yes" then you are part of God's elect. He has chosen you to be a part of his heavenly family and one of the people whom the angels will gather. And your election is made sure by the one who paid the price for it. Jesus, the Son of Man, has not always come in clouds with great power and glory. Our Savior made our election sure when he came to Earth to be in our place. It isn't us who makes our election sure. It's God who does that. We don't have to campaign for God's vote. We don't have to put others down or do special favors for God so he'll choose us. God has already paid the price for our election. And we see how with Jesus, the Son of Man.

Long before he will come in the clouds he came to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. For 33 years he lived on Earth under God's law just as we are right now. He never once broke any laws nor did he lash out in sinful anger at someone. He never talked about other people behind their backs, misuse his body or blessings. And we see how all of this culminates when Jesus went to Calvary. He submitted himself to the authorities and carried his own cross after a sleepless night and countless lacerations. He did not fight back as the nails were pounded into his hands and feet. But as he hung there on the cross, his greatest burden was not the cross itself. It was our sins which brought him to the cross, that had him cry out "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" And once our sins had tormented the Son of Man enough, he breathed his last and died. This was the price for our election – death for our sins. And our Savior, the Son of Man, paid the price for our election by dying on the cross. Now we will rise from the dead just as Jesus rose from the grave on Easter.

All of these wonderful blessings are yours because God has chosen you to be his child. How does that make you feel? To know that long before you were ever formed in the womb, God chose you to be his own. To realize that when Jesus died on the cross, he did so with you in mind so that all your sins could be washed away by his perfect and innocent blood. And he does this not because of who you are, but because of his great love for you. Oh, we cannot fathom the Lord's love for us! As far as the east is from the west, so is his love for you and me right now! And if we ever doubt that love for whatever reason, I encourage you as strongly as I can, to go back to this Word of God and immerse yourself in its wonderful truths.

Through faith in Jesus as your Savior, all of your sins are forgiven. He has chosen you to be his child. He knows and loves you far more than any parent could on Earth. And as his child, he promises to bring you to your heavenly home to be with him forever.

And it is that home in heaven that we look at in today's service of Saints Triumphant. Saints are not people who live really good lives on Earth so they are somehow closer to God as the Catholic Church teaches. No, the Bible teaches that a saint is anyone who believes in Jesus. Since Jesus has paid the price for our election, he has covered our sins over with his righteousness so that we are holy in God's sight. As I look out on you today, I see just a small part of the communion of saints who are all over the world and in heaven. But as long as we are in this world, we are not the saints triumphant. We are the saints militant who continue to fight the good fight of faith. The saints triumphant are those who have moved from this earthly home to their heavenly home. And they are called triumphant because they have finished the good fight of faith and triumphed over Satan and all his temptations. Now they are resting eternally in heaven, free from all the sorrows and battle scars of this world, in joyful bliss with the one who chose them to be his children. This past week, we had the opportunity to celebrate 2 such saints who joined the saints triumphant – Dorothy Rauh and John Lietha. After a lifetime of weary warring with their sinful selves, which you and I are doing right now, they have gone to their eternal home from which they'll never leave.

Just as the Lord promises Dorothy and John are now with the saints triumphant, so he promises us and all those whom the Lord has chosen to believe in Jesus. And all who believe in Jesus when they pass away from this world will praise God forever in heaven with the other saints triumphant. So when you read these words from the Gospel of Mark, how the sun, the moon, and the stars will go out, don't be afraid. When it seems that the very pillars and foundation of this world are all shook up by a surprising election cycle or by your guilty conscience, don't be frightened. The Lord has chosen you to be his. And because Jesus has paid the price for your election, it is a guarantee. You will join the saints triumphant when you pass away. Whether that will happen in the still of the night when you are old, to the beeping of an EKG machine on the hospital bed, or when the Son of Man comes in the clouds and his angels gather his elect on the Last Day, be glad. For that is the day you will finally join the saints triumphant.

Amen.