

# SEQUOYAH HILLS

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## “On Your Marks: Beware of Deceivers”

**Rev. Mark Lampley**

Jer. 29:7-13 and Matt. 13:3-13

November 27, 2022

This morning, we are starting a new sermon series that parallels the start of Advent today, November 27, and ends the first Sunday of Christmas, January 1. The word Advent means coming. As Christians, we look back to when Jesus came as the Christ child. We also look forward to when Jesus will come again in glory at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming at the end of time. This series is about preparing for the return of the Lord of Lords, how we long for Christ’s appearance, and our role in bearing witness to it.

I wonder what kind of Advent preparations get our priority? Is it preparing our hearts to receive again the coming of Christ, or is it more about overly decorating to win the hearts of others? Is it a season for intentionally being still to seek God, or more about busying ourselves with excessive guest preparations? Is it starting new spiritual practices like the Advent wreath-lighting with accompanying devotions, or bowing to a consumer-mentality/ month-long shopping spree Christmas with the inevitable prelude to disappointment? These are only a few things many of us do to acknowledge Advent.

We would be wise men and wise women if we prepare for Christ’s coming by studying the gospels. With this sermon series, we’re digging deep into Mark chapter 13. We pick up today’s lesson at Mark 13:3-13. Let’s go to God’s Word:

*<sup>3</sup> When Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup> “Tell us, when will [the end times] be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?”*

*<sup>5</sup> Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup> When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup> For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.*

*<sup>9</sup> “As for yourselves, beware, for they will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. <sup>10</sup> And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. <sup>11</sup> When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you at that time,*

*for it is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup> Sibling will betray sibling to death and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>13</sup> and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”*  
**Mark 13:3-13**

The Word of the Lord... Thanks be to God.

Pray with me please: *Even before a word is on our tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and Redeemer.*

Problems were looming during Jesus' day. Deceivers, earthquakes, corrupt people, war, betrayal, and hatred. Jesus was right with his disciples experiencing it. They longed for a solution. In their uncertainty, Jesus warns them not to be led astray.

Now, upon hearing Jesus' warnings, they focused their attention on what is seen instead of unseen. They prioritized their attention on the temple that would be destroyed. The disciples thought it would be one of the events that ushered in the end times; the way by which the disciples might know that the end of the age was fast approaching. Most likely, they looked into the future with fear and trembling. Perhaps we, too, should have a healthy, reverent fear regarding the King of Kings returning.

After all, problems are looming today, too. There are: deceivers, earthquakes, corrupt people, war, betrayal, and hatred. God is right with us experiencing it. We long for a solution. In our uncertainty, there's a word from Jesus warning us not to be led astray. We often focus on what's seen, rather than what is unseen.

Jesus cautions us about this, as we think about the end times. We don't know exactly **what** it'll be like, **how** it will happen, nor **when**.

(Disclaimer:) I'm aware with interpreting such apocalyptic theology, we're walking on thin ice, if you will. The frequent mentions of end times in Mark chapter 13 are "happy hunting grounds for people fascinated by the end of the world. It figures prominently in books by doomsayers and in sermons by evangelists more interested in the next world than in this one."

There are many differing interpretations about the future especially the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus. What it will be like. Although we do not know precisely, God is evidently more interested in telling us to beware we don't give in to deceivers, even as we remain people of hope.

Put another way, consider how theologian Donald McKim speaks of it. Paraphrasing him, he says, "The Bible does not intend to give us the detailed blueprint about...a sequence of events that will follow one after another- as much as the Bible wants to convey theological conviction to provide us with all we need for facing the future."

Jesus wants his followers to have hope in the midst of troubles. From what I understand from the Scriptures today, I see a solution to the problems all around us. *Although it's been said many times, in many ways, Jesus is still the answer.*

Jesus says to keep your eyes on the true Messiah. In this, we can be *hopeful* about the future.

We don't deny difficulties and darkness. But, as we endure them, we can be a witness for our sovereign God. We are not people of despair. We are people of HOPE.

There's great hope in Christ's message. He declares that the good news must be preached to all nations. With wisdom, God will use his followers to carry out good.

No need to fear about what to say. God will give the necessary words. I just heard a contemporary illustration of God doing this. Jack Brakebill was a dear and loved member here, and he died this past Monday. Two Saturdays before, though, Jack was surrounded by his family and shared a story with me.

While Jack was on the mission field in Cuba, his co-worker, Daniel, invited him to talk with a minister who had more-or-less gone astray; he'd lost his way with all the challenges around him. Jack nervously approached the situation because he had no training in counseling. He prayed fervently all along their commute. They spoke with the misguided minister. Afterward Jack declared, "I had absolutely no idea what I was going to say, nor do I remember what I said. God gave me the words when it was time to offer hope."

Our Lord guides us and gives us enough. His grace is always sufficient. For He is the Gate, the gate to our future.

We greatly benefit when we focus on Jesus and the message of endurance through our sufferings and tragedies of the world. Instead of being thoroughly depressed about issues in the news or in our lives, we claim the **good news** of his coming again to make all things well.

"We need a hope that draws us into God's future to provide the meaning that we need for our daily lives;" help to face difficulties in even our own death and beyond. "This is Christian hope. It is a hope grounded in God [redeeming us on the cross], raising Jesus Christ from death. It enables us to live and endure all that we face.

Jesus Christ is our hope to look for. He is the one we witness about. So, our view of the future and the assurance we have enables us to live our Christian lives in freedom, boldness, and peace." This is the witness that the world needs.

Jesus empowers us, that as we undergo difficult times, we have the responsibility to share the good news until the end comes.

While we wait and long for Jesus to come again to make everything right, we share what we believe ie. *our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.*

A challenge to spread the good news to all the nations that *Christ is the solid Rock to stand on, all other ground is sinking sand.*

Lest we let our guard down, though. Our Lord says a lot about watching out. Don't be led astray. What is he talking about? It's about our loyalty that we must give to Jesus alone. Not to a pastor, teacher, government leader, social media influencer, TicTok-er, or in anyone else; only Jesus.

He warns followers throughout this whole chapter of Mark 13. This echoes Jeremiah's warning, "Do not let the prophets and others among you deceive you." *Most certainly, we are all deceived at times.* We get deceived so quickly, thinking our happiness comes from accumulation, buying into the false idea that money might keep us secure, comparing ourselves with others instead of serving others, thinking that we know what's best for our futures instead of trusting God, believing the false notion that what we do determines our self-worth, misconstruing that perpetual availability makes us more significant, and so forth.

You get the idea.

As deceived sinners, we deserve punishment for failing to follow God's ways. We are blind. We need a Savior, someone who gives sight to the blind and hope to the hopeless. Thanks be to God, that God compassionately gives such grace. Mercifully, God is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

Over Thanksgiving, I rediscovered a very old book. It belonged to my great-grandfather Pressly. He ministered using this book. It was copyrighted in 1893. A book on sermons that were given at Westminster Abby in England. He has a page folded down and ink-quill writing in the margins. He wrote "fine closing appeal."

It's a hope for those who've been deceived; it's good news for the whole world.

"Come- let the worst [of sinners] come! God has promised that they shall be forgiven... To every penitent I say, come boldly; come assuredly; come expecting to be heard."

Take heart, friends, in our waiting and suffering, God hears and knows our struggle! God provides grace even when we get off track.

Be hopeful with a future in God, who rescues us in the end. God gives hope which is the present needed at Christmas and beyond; it's the witness we get to share; the solution to the problems. "The one who endures to the end will be saved." The one who prepares for and longs for Christ, God will spare from destruction.

Thanks be to God!