

Hebrews 10:11-25 The Unshakable End
Mark 13:1-8
November 17, 2024

As promised, we have read scriptures about the End; What will it be like? When will it come? What should we think about it? The theological word for these considerations is, Eschatology, which means, “words about the End,” or, “the study of the End times.” We may think of it as a conversation about the consummation of the age, or the Return of Christ.

The title of the sermon is, “The Unshakable End,” and the word, “unshakable,” is really just a polite synonym for, “stubborn.” The End is stubborn in two ways. First, it is stubborn in its approach. It is coming, and there isn’t anything that can be done to stop it. But it is also stubborn in its delay. It is coming on its own time and is known for its refusal to obey predictions and expectations. From the human perspective, it is coming slowly, and there doesn’t seem to be any way to speed it up. We may think of the end in three ways; the end of our life, the end of an era, and the end of time.

We must always start with the acknowledgment that there is such a thing. Before a reflection upon the epistle reading, let me say that sometimes we mistake the end of an era, a convulsive, “shaking of the foundations,” regarding human life, for the actual End of the Age. Presently we are living in transformational times and have been for the last few hundred years. Our reflections have something to say about all three

ideas, and *transformational times* are not the same as the End of Time. Something to bear in mind.

Even more remote to us is the idea of the End of time. First of all, even the scientific community tells us that the universe wasn’t always, and will one day be no more. Long before the sun’s heat swallows up the earth life will become unsustainable here in a way that has nothing to do with the present climate crisis. It is a mark of spiritual maturity to make this acknowledgment.

Secondly, in the bible the concept of the End is always thought of as a fulfillment, a completion of things. It is likened to the building of a building, that is under construction and will one day be finished; or a long journey that will one day reach its destination.

Beyond all that, people are put in a situation of curiosity and even anxiety about the details; when and where and how, and *how will we know?* Much of what provides answers about such things comes from the so-called apocalyptic sections of the gospels such as the 13th chapter of Mark’s gospel and some of Paul’s letters, including 1 Thessalonians, and from the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation in the New, both of which come from the literary genre called Jewish Apocalyptic Literature.

One might say that there is some ambiguity about all that, because there has always been a conviction that the end is near, and most every question about the, “signs of the times,” makes it clear that the signs are

all present and the time is ripe; and yet the end stubbornly persists in its restraint.

Since there are clear statements as well, that no one knows the when of things, we are encouraged not to be overly concerned; which raises the questions of the day; how shall we think while we wait? What are our assurances? What should be feared? To put it into the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, “how shall we live, “as we see the Day approaching?”

We have made a great deal this morning about the Beatitudes and it seems like something should be said about them, and I will leave it at this; they give a great hint about what to expect and how to live in the waiting.

With that said, we look to the text from Hebrews. The Letter to the Hebrews uses as the foundation of its message one of the practices of historical Israelite religion, involving a Temple, where priests offer sacrifices on behalf of the people; for the forgiveness of their sins, and as expressions of gratitude for God’s provision.

This letter was written close to the time when, like print journalism and movie rentals in our times, temple shrines in general were falling into disuse, and when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed for the final time. An illustration based on it was still meaningful, and is still today.

Such is what the author does. Christ represents the last High Priest, who offers his own life as a once-and-for-all sacrifice that eliminates the need for temple shrines and points to the next age. It points to the Eschatological age, the time of the Kingdom of God.

We are given this amazing assurance that comes originally from the prophet Jeremiah:

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after that time,’ says the Lord, ‘I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.’ Then he adds: ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.’”

With this marvelous promise there is given in the next six verses, the instructions.”

1- Let us draw near to God with the full assurance of faith.

2 - Let us hold unswervingly to the hope that we profess.

3 - Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds.

4 - Let us not give up meeting together.

5 - Let us encourage one another.

By no means is this a comprehensive list or one that describes fully the faithful life. It is a good place to

start and it gives a pretty good idea of what faithful living is like. There are several things to notice about what is not said in this reading:

1 - There are no instructions about how to handle the implications of living life in the industrial age.

2 - One is not told what time to get up in the morning or go to bed at night.

3 - Or what vocation to pursue.

4 - Or whether to be neat or messy

5 - Or to like dogs or cats

6 - Where to live, in Corinth or Ephesus, or Rome; in Columbus, Cleveland, or Cincinnati.

7 - To marry or not to marry, and to whom

And so on. I am sure there are countless other things that could be mentioned, but it is clear that the first and most important thing is to accept that God is for us; that God has acted on our behalf, and has achieved for us forgiveness, and that what God has done and said is good and right and just, and final. It is God's purpose to internalize it.

Because of what God has done we can be confident of a new and living way in this earthly world with its pain and suffering and death; but also in its beauty and wonder and joy. The result may not seem

decisive, it may seem like a capitulation to the negative facts of our existence, we accept the way things are *for the time being*. That is what waiting means. But it has more power than that.

It has more power than that because in the faith that God is for us, we are not torn down by the struggles of life, there is less anxiety and fear; and in the impetus towards love and hope, and the reality that good deeds are possible in any situation, day-to-day life is less burdensome, even joyous. And that characterizes the faithful life as the End approaches.

Let us remind ourselves that almost 2,000 years has passed since these words were written. There have been many trying times, and there will certainly be more. And the recipients of this letter were not integrated well into the political and economic life of the world.

But their hopefulness and their love, and their acceptance of God's grace has persisted through the ages and we have received it as an inheritance that will sustain us throughout our days, and can be confident will persist throughout the generations, such as they may be, until the Unshakable End.

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