

Proceed for I am With You Always 2024  
 Joshua 1:1-2, 5-9 Mark 13:1-8, 32-33

### Joshua 1:1-2, 5-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

### Mark 13:1-8, 32-33 (New Revised Standard Version)

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 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. "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.

I first preached a sermon on this Mark 13 passage  
 just a few months out of seminary at my first church.

I began my sermon that day, that Fall morning in October,  
 by informing the congregation that **they were not really there.**

I held up his two books and explained that

Harold Camping, a noted Bible scholar, teacher and evangelist,  
 through extensive study of Scripture & numerology calculations  
 had determined with absolute certainty that Jesus would

return on Sept. 14,  
 1994 or on Sept. 21<sup>st</sup>, at the latest--

-- and therefore we could not still be in Sneads Ferry, NC in October...

**... but somehow we were.**

Several years ago, when our granddaughters were still toddlers

my son-in-law came upstairs to speak with me in my home office.

At his church, having recently read LaHaye's book, "Left Behind",  
his pastor was totally focused on Revelation and the end times.

He'd convinced Mike that the second coming was imminent  
and that the world was going to be ending pretty soon,  
**so he wanted to talk to me about what he should be doing to be ready.**

Of course as a pastor and father-in-law I was thrilled  
and delighted that he was taking his faith seriously...

...but also somewhat horrified when he talked about quitting his job  
so he could study the Bible more and focus on preparing for the end,  
since, as he explained it,  
if you read the Bible and follow current events,  
then obviously the apocalypse is drawing near.

But instead of screaming what I was actually thinking,

I handed him a Bible & asked him to read Mark 13 out loud, vs. 5, 7 & 32,

Then Jesus said to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, **but the end is still to come.** But about that day or hour **no one knows**, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ... **for you do not know when the time will come.**

I explained to my son-in-law that those words were still true,  
calling us not to worry or panic into doing something really stupid,  
like quitting his job that fed, supported & cared for his family.

Jesus said those things knowing he'd be crucified in a couple of days,  
and that for the disciples and for his followers,  
it would feel like their whole world had just ended.

But there will always be struggle, confusion and tribulation,  
and we may feel afraid, anxious, discouraged or disappointed,  
**but don't assume that means it's the end of the world.**

Jesus wanted his disciples to hang in there with strength and courage  
by knowing and trusting  
that despite terrifying and threatening appearances,  
God was in charge and fulfilling his wonderful purpose.

This passage in Mark 13 begins with how the disciples were amazed,  
perhaps like rural visitors gawking at New York City skyscrapers,  
much impressed by the majesty of the Temple in Jerusalem  
that seemed so immense and solid, and sure to last forever.

The Temple was one of the great wonders of the ancient world,  
an impressive structure rising 70 feet up from Mount Moriah,  
with its white and gold walls visible from many miles away,  
a remarkable human achievement expected to last for all time. vs. 1-2

As he (Jesus) came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

The disciples must have been shocked beyond belief by all that,  
for surely that great and grand Temple  
would last and stand for all time and beyond.

Yet < 40 years **exactly what Jesus said about the Temple did happen.**

I find it fascinating how literally those words were fulfilled.

The Roman general Titus had the Temple deliberately burned down,  
and then later on, scavengers pried the Temple stones apart  
trying to get at the precious metals that had melted  
and seeped down between the stones during the fire...

**... but Jesus was doing much more than just predicting a future event.**

Jesus also spoke those words to strengthen & encourage his followers  
who would then see and experience the Temple completely destroyed,  
and warning them to **remain faithful and hopeful**  
**even amid that disaster and terrible upheaval.**

It was to encourage trust, faith and patience in the present,  
and to prepare for life amid the coming rubble and ruin.

Jesus wanted them to persevere with faith, courage and strength,  
knowing and trusting in the Lord's promises with confidence,  
& that despite the terrifying threat & chaos all around them,  
God was at work even amid the turbulence, confusion & rubble.

God was still in charge and fulfilling his promises and purpose.  
Their task was to **be & build** the Church by making disciples,  
by living in faith, hope and trust **instead of fear & panic.**

So don't lose your sense of hope and confidence in the Lord,  
or rely just on what you can see, or on human works & achievements,  
for however impressive they may seem in the present,  
ultimately they'll fail & fall, they'll not stand.

The disciples must have been absolutely stunned by what Jesus said,  
for surely the majestic towering Temple would stand & last forever,  
and so, when they were alone, they asked Jesus, vs. 4~6, 32,

**"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"** Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray... Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and **they will lead many astray...** but about the day or hour no one knows...

Don't follow those **who claim** they have figured out God's mysteries,  
**for God alone knows the when, the how and the why of the future.**

The Gospel of Mark was written long after Jesus ascended,  
during a time of growing rebellion against the Roman occupation.

Some Jewish zealots were teaching and claiming as prophecy,  
that now was truly the time as promised in Scripture,  
when God would miraculously restore the nation of Israel.

And by repeating these words spoken by Jesus, through this passage  
Mark was urging them not follow those false prophets and leaders,  
or assume that rebellion against Rome  
would usher in the promised Kingdom of God.

The point to us, there will always be some struggle and tribulation.  
You may feel afraid, anxious, discouraged or disappointed,  
but don't assume that it means it's the end of the world.

By faith, know and trust that the Lord God is still fulfilling  
his promise & purpose, to cleanse, heal & save broken humanity.  
**Just as Jesus originally said, this was a call to persevere,  
that whatever was going on, or whatever situation we face,  
be faithful, be alert, and continue to obey and serve God...**

**... joyfully, generously, creatively, just follow and trust the Lord,  
so that whatever is happening to you or the events of this world,  
walk with God in confident, authentic and hopeful faith  
that lives out God's grace with courage and strength,  
for God never abandons his beloved and precious children,  
and upon that truth concerning the nature of God, we can fully rely.**

Our true hope is that through it all, we can trust that God is with us,  
and that God is still accomplishing his gracious and saving purpose.  
**Whatever our current situation or circumstance,  
our call is to live in trust and faithfully serve well  
along whatever journey the Lord has laid out before us.**

**We are all, all of us, the blessed and beloved children of God,  
each one uniquely equipped with potential for greatness and good,  
but are we really living our lives defined by God's grace?**

**Do we proclaim Gospel joy & passion through this life we're living?**

Now that doesn't mean we always feel joy and delight every moment.  
At times we may feel afraid, anxious, discouraged or disappointed,  
but it is having a sense of confident trust, hope and patience  
that God will never abandon us & never be defeated or surprised.

It also means that my struggles and challenges will be put to good use  
by the Lord accomplishing according to his good purpose & blessing,  
as Paul writes in **Romans 8:28**,

*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

Our hope is that through all things, we can trust that God is with us,

and that by the Creator's power, will, blessing and design,  
God is still accomplishing his gracious and healing purpose.

In the Joshua text we read, imagine Joshua's doubt and trepidation  
anticipating the tasks and journey God has laid out before him,

**Joshua was supposed to follow in the footsteps of Moses.**

Moses, he was the guy who spoke directly to God,  
or from a burning bush, or fire and lightning atop Mt. Sinai,  
and who somehow got mighty Pharaoh to let the people go...

**... and so now it falls to Joshua, and where Moses came up short,  
to lead the people, and to enter and conquer the Promised Land.**

In the Joshua 1 passage, the task is laid out in two stages.

First, realistically assess the situation. vs. 1-2, 5~6

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of  
Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all  
this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. ... .. As I was with Moses, so I will  
be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous.

**Moses is gone, so get going on the task that God has given you.**

**And here's the promises that goes with the job ---**

**I'll be right there with you,**

**I've called and equipped you to do it well,**

**and moreover, I will do the heavy lifting.**

**That is God's desire and intention for how his servants**

**should see and perceive our tasks and the journey ahead.**

The second part: do not waver but be strong and courageous. vs. 7,9

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my  
servant Moses commanded you; do ... I hereby command you: **Be strong and courageous; do not be  
frightened or dismayed**, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

**We are, all of us, the blessed and beloved children of God.**

**The amazing grace of God makes us who we truly are,**

**and assures us of a wonderful and secure future ...**

**... but is that really the way we live, lives defined by God's grace?**

**Do we have joy and passion for this life we are living?**

And what is it about today that will be

worth having gotten out of bed this morning?

**Do I gratefully embrace each day as a sign of God's grace?,**

**for the amazingly wonderful gift that life truly is,**

**and try to squeeze from it all the joy and delight I can?**

Surely life is too precious to be wasted or rendered insignificant!

For Christians, our lives are classrooms for spiritual growth  
where the tasks, the events and circumstances of life  
can help teach and train, preparing us for eternal life  
by allowing God to work his grace and purpose in & through us.

Please do an experiment with me, hold up your hand and breathe on it.

Does your breath feel warm and moist?

Ok then, God isn't done with you yet.

All of us, we still have more life to live,  
and blessings from God even amid our worst struggles & situations.

Our call today, is to consider our life and mission with Jesus,  
and what are the obstacles or fears that are holding us back  
or that detract from a more authentic walk with God,  
or the joyful life and blessings God intends for us?

To that end, I urge you to connect or reconnect **by participating**,  
by finding ways that you can share in the mission of the Lord,  
and let God's grace, power & Holy Spirit transform our lives.

By grace, God will provide all the strength and courage we need,  
so please, don't sit on the sidelines, when God is calling you,  
and if you need a personal invitation ---  
then consider yourself invited,  
and if you need to be asked, then listen, I'm asking you.

God's purpose is grace, to heal our human sin, wounds and brokenness,  
for our spiritual development, and for us to grow closer to God  
by deepening and improving our walk of faith with Jesus Christ...  
**... and by recognizing our unique place and purpose within God's plan.**

As Paul wrote, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.