

The End of the Old, Part 2

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 13:14-31

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Good morning again. I want to take this opportunity to introduce this passage in a way that I don't normally introduce sermons. If you're visiting with us, I want to let you know you're coming—if for the first time—you're coming in the middle of a chapter that is the longest speech that Jesus gives in the Gospel of Mark. So that might not be interesting to you, but I want to apologize to you, that much of what is going to be said today is said in the context of what has already been said last week and next week. We hope that you come again. But for those of you who are a regular part and who have been here, you will have heard what I just said already. This is the longest discourse that we have of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and it's coming at the end of Mark. And it's coming to a crisis point in the Gospel and in the ministry of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection.

So with that said, let me give these words of introduction. And this is not a normal, if you will, a typical kind of sermon that I give. The reason for that is that this text calls for a little bit deeper dive, and I apologize. Perhaps it might seem like a Sunday School to you and less like a sermon. I'll do the best I can. The reason for this is, depending on which way you go with this passage—and particularly the verses that I'll be covering this morning—depending on which way you take it, you end up maybe in the same neighborhood, but a very different address. And I think and I will argue that the way in which I believe these verses are to be interpreted and understood—recognizing they are the direction I'm choosing to take—that I believe it gives us an even greater understanding of just how beautiful, just how powerful and worthy of praise Jesus is.

It isn't to suggest that if you take another tack or another interpretation that Jesus is any less worthy of praise. That's not what I mean. What I mean is this. That when you go to seminary and you've already done your undergrad and then you go on to post-doctoral work, and your goal is to teach in the academy or in a seminary—wherever it might be in the world—and you're teaching in the Christian tradition, you'll be familiar with this chapter. And the last hundred years the Church of Jesus Christ has taken these verses and has gone one of two ways with it. Now one particular way seems to have gathered most of the momentum. That is not the tack which I'm taking this morning. So it's not to say that the direction that I'm going this morning is any less biblical. It's not the point. The point is you need to recognize scholars disagree on how to interpret these verses.

That said, I'm not presenting this morning this passage or my interpretation as 'Thus saith the Lord.' That is not what I mean. What I do mean is I'm given a choice as a pastor and a preacher. That before me I have years of both experience and training of those men and women who have influenced my own education. I also have lots of scholarship—hundreds of years of scholarship. I could spend, literally, the rest of my ministry studying these verses. That's how important these are. And so I have to make a choice. What direction am I going to go in? These are the same choices that Pastor PD and Pastor John—when he's ordained in a couple of weeks, he will get to make those kinds of decisions, too. And we bear a responsibility, and that responsibility is to be fair and accurate to the Word of God. You as the hearers are given the

instruction by God's Word to hear those who teach you and to take in what they say and to ask questions. So this is an open dialogue. I invite questions.

But I want to be clear. I come before you not only as a pastor and preacher, I come as a follower of Jesus Christ. And so I offer this not as 'Thus saith the Lord,' but what I believe these verses teach. Fair enough? How's that for an introduction? Let's read together. Mark Chapter 13. "The End of the Old: Part 2." Mark 13:14-31.

¹⁴ "But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, ¹⁶ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁷ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ¹⁸ Pray that it may not happen in winter. ¹⁹ For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. ²⁰ And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. ²¹ And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. ²² For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. ²³ But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.

²⁴ "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And 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.

²⁸ "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Will you pray with me. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of God stands forever. Our hope, our authority is your word. Lord Jesus, you have given us these words to read. You inspired Mark to write them. It has been passed down from generation to generation, and we receive it and hear it this morning. So we ask, that by the presence of your Holy Spirit present in your church, may you teach us. May you teach us ultimately that you are our heavenly Father. That Jesus, you are our Savior. That the Holy Spirit will guide us in all truth. And that when things are not clear, we are still called to walk in faith, knowing that we cannot see fully or understand fully yet, but one day we will when Christ comes again. But we would ask that as we read and learn from this word this morning, that you would build our faith, strengthen our understanding, and give us a love for Jesus that cannot be shaken. Do this, we ask. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So you will see in your outline this morning, looking at this text I have decided to, of course, look at it as our English translations have headlined these different verses, these sections—not headlined it, but certainly laid them out in paragraph form. You will see that there is language here that talks about **Preparing for Destruction**. Secondly, the **Language of Destruction**. And finally, **The Promise of Destruction**. So **Preparing, the Language, and Promise of Destruction**. So let's go.

in these verses that open, 14-23, are similar to what Pastor P.D. shared with us last week. It is a solemn warning, a reminder, to keep watch, to be careful, to be on your guard. The same is the case here that Jesus, in his explaining to his disciples—if you'll remember they were asking him what is to happen in these last days. “Tell us,” then, they say, “when all these things will be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” This is what ignited Jesus's answer. This is not being taught to the vast public. It is being taught to his disciples, who, really, are showing us that they are very good, faithful, first century Jews. What do they want to know? They want to know when [is] the end coming? When will Rome be defeated? When will the kingdom of God be made manifest and Israel returned again to its glory, as under David? These have been the questions that the disciples have had in their minds and have been asking Jesus. Jesus answers these things, and he tells them not to be anxious—to be aware that because of his name they will receive trial, tribulation, persecution, but to not be afraid of it. That language continues in this passage.

But he says here, and with Mark's little parenthetical statement—“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not to be...” meaning what he's referring to already, is that the temple is going to be removed. And what Mark is saying—“(let the reader understand)” —what Jesus is referring to [is] that this is going to happen. And so Jesus is referring, first and foremost, to a question and to a conversation his disciples have been having with regard to the temple. It was a marvelous temple: incredibly beautiful, intricately designed and built. They were marveling at its size.

So all of this is happening with first century Jewish disciples asking another Jew, who is said to be the Messiah, who is now prophesying what is going to happen, specifically with the issues that they are interested in. They are interested in what's going to happen about this temple thing. What do you mean ‘the stones are going to come down’? So the whole question, the whole section, is to be understood within a historical context first. That historical context that Jesus is talking about is exactly what he is prophesying about—what is going to happen in several years, in a few decades.

But before he gets there he talks about how ought they to be preparing for what is to come. You'll notice what he says here. First he says to flee, not to take up a defense. The passage is very clear. It says, hey, listen, if you're on the housetop, get off that housetop. If you're in the field, don't go back home. If you feel tempted to go back home and grab your stuff—too late. Because what's going to happen is, desolation is coming. And desolation is coming to the temple. And desolation is coming to Jerusalem.

Now imagine this for just a second. Remember, first century Jewish disciples looking at Jesus, asking him, OK, when is this going to happen? And we know that in the book of Acts, even after the resurrection, in the first chapter of Acts, they're still saying, so now are you coming to

restore Israel? What were they concerned about? Here is the broader historical context. Who is ruling Israel? Rome. They long to be back in their glorious power of Israel, not under the thumb of Roman rule. Meaning, Israel is still in exile. They have not been restored as they had expected. And so if Jesus is now prophesying that desolation is about to come, what would a natural Jewish response be if your city was being attacked? You want to rise up to its defense. You want to get involved in the fight. Jesus says, no, you're to flee. Don't rise up in defense. Don't be concerned about your goods. You need to flee. And in a tender, pastoral heart, he even says to women who will be pregnant, pray that it will not come in winter. Knowing that this destruction that will happen to Jerusalem, of all places, will cause great uproar—not just locally, but internationally.

Cast your minds back to 9/11, 2001. Many of you remember sitting like we were, twelve miles west of New York City, watching our television. Our phones not working, planes not flying out of Newark over our house, watching the towers come down. I remember—as our child was only months old—Kate and I looking at each other in tears. What is happening? It was cataclysmic, earth shattering. This is the kind of cataclysm that Jesus is referencing. And he's saying don't go home. Find safety. That's remarkable that Jesus would say that to his disciples. Flee.

But he then says something else. Be on your guard. Here's that language again. Be on guard. Because when cataclysm happens, when things are shaken, when things are unsure, man, people rise up. People rise up with all kinds of ideas. People rise up with all kinds of conspiracy theories. Leaders will rise up to take advantage of the instability. This is human nature, 101. And Jesus simply says there will be those who will say, 'There's the Christ.' 'No, there he is.' I tell you, that is false.

And something else that could also be the case, and is most certainly the case, which Pastor Mayfield referred to last week. It's not just that some will say, 'Here is the Christ' or 'No, there is the Christ.' There will be those who will look at Christ and say, "No, he is not the Christ. He is not he." So it's not just that there'll be those who will say, 'Come and follow me,' there will be those who will seek to say to those who have faith in Christ, 'He is not who you say he is.' So Jesus, in his pastoral heart and his love for his disciples, is giving them an answer they never would have fathomed. This is coming. The desolation will come. Flee. Don't defend, don't gather up your stuff. Flee. But be on your guard. There will be those who try to draw away my followers to follow false christs.

So after he says this, he then in verses 24-27 uses the **Language of Destruction** in describing the events that will happen in Jerusalem. Beginning in verse 24 he says, "But in those days, after that tribulation,"—after the suffering, after the persecution, after the fleeing, after all of those things—know that "after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see that the Son of Man is coming in clouds with great power and glory." So after the warning, now we get to the good stuff. Now we get to the part that calls us to understand.

So let me lay it out this way. First, by and large, for the last hundred or so years, the Christian understanding of these verses is about the apocalypse. However, the last hundred years is not the only time apocalypse is talked about. But what is unique about how, by and large, the

Christian church has understood this apocalypse is unique. And [what is] unique is this. For the last hundred years it is believed that these verses are referring to Jesus's second coming. Now what will happen is, this will mark the end of time and space continuum as we experience it now. Now what's unique about that is, that it's only largely been in the last 120 years that that has been the conclusion or the belief about what apocalypse actually is.

Now what's interesting is this. What's interesting is that when these words are read together with the rest of Chapter 13, there enters in what I believe to be—and other scholars believe to be—a false dualism. Oftentimes the reason why this is understood to be the end of the space-time continuum, the second coming of Christ, is because inherent within a lot of the Christian church over the last 120 years is: Creation is bad and evil, the spirit is good. The earth is bad; heaven is good. So what Jesus is referring to is, he's coming back and he's going to get rid of all of it and heaven will come.

But what is interesting is, that is a uniquely western Christian understanding of this within the last 120 years. The Bible does not have any such view of creation. Creation is not bad or evil and the spiritual is good. The Bible does not pit heaven and earth against one another, because God created all things and said it was good. Fallen human beings and the nature of sin have polluted creation, for sure. But that is a long way away from suddenly God saying the earth and all creation is evil or bad. This false dualism is not to be found in Scripture. At least, that's what I'm postulating to you this morning. But this understanding leads us to interpret these words, that what Jesus is referring to is the end time. There will be a tribulation prior to Jesus's second coming, and when he does, it will be cosmic in nature and these verses are read literally. That is, the destruction of the earth, or certainly its desolation, and that the Son of Man, Jesus, will come on clouds in his return and second coming. So that is the first way of understanding these verses, 24-27.

Now let's move to the second way of understanding these verses. The second understanding of these verses is what a first century Jew would have understood these verses, to understand what Jesus was using. Jesus was using apocalyptic language. Apocalyptic language and apocalyptic literature is extremely multi-layered, heavily nuanced, and highly figurative. With that said, these verses and what they refer to can be found in the following books. They can be found in Joel, Amos, Zephaniah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel. And when they are read there, a Jew would never have read apocalyptic verses or words literally. In other words, they represented something. They were to represent, perhaps, an historical event that will happen, but not in a literal way that they do here. But they point to, in this instance, a destruction.

Now how would a first century Jew have understood this? A first century Jew would have understood it this way. That what Jesus is referencing, is that God will come to crush his enemies, and the enemy is Rome, because that's the way first century Jews interpreted Daniel and Isaiah and Jeremiah as prophesying to. And that what they were prophesying is that they will be under the thumb of an enemy nation. And that when God returns, that enemy nation will be thrown down, the kingdom of God will come, Israel will rise up in its former glory, a king will sit on the throne, and Jerusalem yet again will be the center of attention in global politics. This was the belief. This is why even after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples say this: "So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" [Acts 1:6]. So a Jew, and specifically his disciples to whom he is speaking in these

verses, would have understood Jesus not speaking literally, but highly figuratively. And they would have interpreted in light of Roman rule and its destruction and the rehabilitation, the revival of Israel.

But I want to offer to you that neither of these are the case, but rather there is a third option. And it is this. That Jesus, in using apocalyptic language, is doing something that is no less controversial, but establishes him to be the last prophet, the last priest, and the last king. Let me explain. So Jesus, in using and appropriating apocalyptic language which can be found in the books of the prophets that I referenced earlier—Jesus is picking up on this language and utilizing it again. These would have been familiar words to his disciples, and what this whole conversation has been coming about.

Why? Because, if you recall, as Jesus was coming into Jerusalem it was at Passover. He's looking at the temple, which ought to be in full righteous worship of the God of Israel, and it's not. It is full of money changers. It's not a house of prayer. They're using it against God's people. People are trying to take advantage of others and making money. People who should be allowed in are not being let in. Men who ought to be holy are living double lives and they are living in self-righteousness. They think they have it all together, but instead of teaching—as they ought—Israel as a nation to worship the Lord, they are not. They are simply being false shepherds. Jesus, when he looks out on to Jerusalem before he enters in, judges it, and judges the temple.

And it is Jesus who prophesies that this temple will be torn down, but in three days will be re-raised. Whoa, what is he saying? What he's saying is I will be the temple, not this place. Israel is not God's glory, the elect are. Jerusalem is not the capital. No, where ever you are, I will be with you, also. I will not be on this mountain or that mountain. No, he promises the giving of his Holy Spirit. So Jesus is using highly apocalyptic language to actually suggest that the enemy, first and foremost, is not Rome, but Jerusalem. Jerusalem has become the great Babylon. Jerusalem is the one that is full of false worship. Jerusalem is the one that is not praising God in all of his glory. Jerusalem and the temple are being filled with things that aren't glorifying to God, but rather leading people astray. And first and foremost, Jerusalem will be the place where Jesus will be tried and sentenced and taken outside the city and hung on a cross. It will be Jerusalem that rejects Jesus. It will be the Israelite religious leaders who say we want nothing to do with you. Put him on the cross.

So when Jesus is establishing these words, he's using highly figurative language not to refer to his second coming, but rather to refer to God's glory when the city of Jerusalem and the temple are finally judged. And when the language like this, verse 26: "And when they see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory," that is apocalyptic language, which is found in these [prophets]—Joel, Amos, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Daniel—are used to refer to what God does when he comes in judgment. It is highly regal. It is highly metaphorical to speak of God who's coming. And we get a courtside seat to watch what he's going to do. He's getting ready to throw down. And this is the Bible's way of saying it. Are the stars literally going to fall from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken? No. But it is biblical language to say what is about to happen has never happened before in quite this way. Because when it happens there will be no more sacrifices. There'll be no more temple. No one will be able to say come to this city or that city. No, no, no. The king will come, but he will come and he will bring destruction in his hands.

And guess what happens in 68 and 70 A.D.? The Roman world is thrown into a political uproar. And one ascends to the throne, and then they come into Jerusalem and it is completely and utterly destroyed. And the temple has never been rebuilt. Not a sacrifice has been offered.

Now why do I say this? Why do I choose that Jesus is using apocalyptic language—not to speak of his second return, the end of a space-time sort of reality, but rather to refer to a historical event? It's because of the words that are to come next, **The Promise of Destruction**. What does he say in verses 28. He says, "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near." Again, he's coming back again to that fig tree analogy which he used as a metaphor earlier. And so what he's saying is, when you see these events happen, when you see armies coming to Jerusalem, you will know... [cell phone rings in congregation] (Somebody's trying to call you. That's what you know. Can I have that? I'll answer it. Now, I'm just kidding. That would be funny, wouldn't it? That would be so good. I want to do that sometime. That'd be great.)

So what's interesting is, he says these are the things you will know that this is coming close, because they will be gathering to destroy Jerusalem. And in verse 29 he says this. "So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates." Well, who is the 'he'? But it also can be said this way. In the Greek it says, "So also, when you see these things take place, you know that it is near." It could also be translated that way. I'm not suggesting that this is wrong, but I'm simply saying that the 'he is near' part is that the Kingdom of God is near. It's being established.

Why? He says, "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until these things take place." Wait a second. So if this is referring to Jesus's second coming and he says this generation will not pass away until these things happen, guess what that means. That means Jesus will have to have returned during this generation's life. If you don't take it that way, then you have to reinterpret the word 'generation,' that refers to something else. But that begins to stretch the word 'generation' in the Greek in a way that doesn't make sense to its actual reading in this particular context. Jesus is looking at his disciples. He's been talking about this and speaking of historical events. And he says, "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until these things take place." These historical events take place, and guess what. They were alive when Jerusalem was sacked. In fact, the Gospel of John was written after 70 A.D. And if these things didn't take place, John would never have taken Jesus's words with any sort of hope or trust. No one in first century Christendom, biblically or outside the biblical testimony, speak that Jesus was falsely prophesying about was going to historically happen.

And there is absolutely no—although there are some who believe that Jesus did return during that generation, but that is not a view we take. But what he is establishing is this will happen. "Truly," that is, the verse, "Truly, I say to you," verse 30. That's Jesus's—that's been his mode there in all the synoptic gospels when he says this. "Truly, I say to you." He's saying, pay attention, what I'm about to say to you is going to happen. Pay attention. So he says, "This generation will not pass away."

And he says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." That's other apocalyptic language of saying your world may feel like it's being shaken to its core, but know

this. My Word will not pass away. That's why I was referencing in my prayer 'the grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of God stands forever.' Jesus is saying you will try to figure these things out. You'll see these things happen on a cataclysmic scale. It will rock your world, and you're going to say, <<gasp>>, What do I do?!? And Jesus is saying, but remember what I said I would do. I am going to die on a cross for your sin. I'll be laid in the grave and on the third day I will rise again. And these things will happen. Trust in who speaks. Jesus is speaking.

Now what are the implications for this? Jesus is clearly telling his disciples, be on your watch. Meaning this is something you're going to see. Number 2: this generation. And number 3: This is going to take place, and when it does, what is established? By taking this particular interpretation not as a literal reference to Jesus's second coming, but rather to events that will happen in history—specifically the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple—instead of destabilizing the merit of who Jesus is, it rather establishes it all the more.

Why do I say that? It is because that when Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed, who ultimately is vindicated? Jesus is. Who ultimately is exalted? Jesus is. Why? Because he is the last Priest. Christ would go to the cross as our sacrifice and he would rise again—not just a sacrifice, but as our High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, God's word tells us. He is the last prophet, because Jesus prophesies these things to happen historically. And in 70 A.D., not just the Christian church, but all Jewish historians attest to this historical fact. This happened. And so the disciples see this happen, and what did they know? He was right! He is not just the last prophet, he is the Prophet of prophets. And when the Temple is destroyed and no other sacrifices are to be given, and the elect are gathered, who are the elect? It is the Church of Jesus Christ. So who is the King? Jesus? Who belongs to him? The Church of Jesus Christ. Who is the new Israel? The church, which he is building upon the testimony of his Word, preached through the disciples.

So the Kingdom of God, indeed, comes. The words of Jesus are vindicated. So where does that leave us? Does that mean that we're saying Jesus is not coming again in a second coming? Nope, he is. But it's just not to be found here in these verses. It's not something that we can't somehow also learn from these verses. It actually says we can't read the tea leaves to find out when Jesus is exactly coming back in his second return. It will be as he said. It will be and come like a thief in the night. It doesn't mean we're any less prepared or any less on our watch or any less on our guard. All the more so! Jesus, we pray, will come again today. And we can't look at history to try to figure it out. But we know that he is King, and the King will come when the King and the Father wills it. And when he comes, he will come to gather to himself his people.

But what do we say about the second coming? If not these verses, then where? One of the places that we can turn to...and I'll finish with this. (How am I doing on time? Almost done, I promise.) Acts Chapter 1. If there is any place which Jesus would be expected to go into great detail about the nature of his second coming, it would be here. Because this is post resurrection, he's appearing to his disciples, and they're asking questions.

Here's again what he says. "And while staying with them he ordered..."—verse 4—"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" That, too, happens and is attested to.

Verse 6. "So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" Ok, they're still there. Jesus is raised from the dead and they're still asking questions about what is he going to do with regard to the nation of Israel. And he said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you've seen him go into heaven.'"

That's the reference to the second coming. But you know what's remarkable? It's not on Jesus's lips. It's on the lips of an angel. Why do I say that? Because Jesus, in his last words in the presence of his disciples, what does he tell them to do? Witness about me. Tell the world of who I am. Do you know what that does? As I was preparing for this sermon and next week's, and P.D. and the whole pastoral staff as we were talking about these [things], I was gripped with this reality. We so much over the last hundred years—we want the drama of what God is doing. So we want the drama to be about the Second Coming, when God comes back in all the drama and he's going to make things happen. He's going to kick butt and take names, and that's what we want the drama to be.

But what's really interesting? Jesus is coming again and it will be full of drama, but do you know the drama that Jesus is focused on? How we live now. How we live in preparation for his return. The drama is not in the cataclysm; the drama is in do you love me? Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Do you forgive others as you have been forgiven? Have you told others or are you shamed of who I am? Tell others what I have done, that I have come as a sacrifice for sin. I've come to reestablish, to reunite you with the Father. I have come as the Prophet, Priest and King that we've always wanted, but didn't know we really needed. For I have come and I have taken away the sin of the world. And in him is life and light and salvation.

Please hear me. I'm not suggesting at all that there's not going to be any drama. I'm not suggesting at all that it's not important. It is. But the emphasis of today, is that today is the day that the Lord has given. And what he longs for is saying I have died for you and been raised to life for you. Do you love me? Now love others. I have forgiven you, so forgive others. And tell the world about me.

Let's pray. Father, I want to thank you for the patience of those who are here. We want to thank you for your word. We want to thank you for the bond of unity that we have in Christ, even though we may disagree on particular verses. But ultimately, in the end, we recognize and establish that Jesus Christ is Lord and that you are the only hope for salvation. And that you have promised to come again, but you've told us to be ready today. And so I ask you, O Lord, enable us by your Holy Spirit to love you and to witness to your work. May you receive all the praise, honor and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.