

"And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven."

- Mark 13:27

Joel 2

Mark 13:1-27

Psalm 147

New Book of Worship, Psalm 147, p.89

The chapter of the Gospel of Mark from which this text is taken is sometimes called the "little Apocalypse," for it treats of the same subjects as the Book of Revelation. Our text, then, forms a part of the Lord's description of His Second Advent. That Advent was to be the bright and happy culmination of a series of tremendous events and dire catastrophies. The whole earth is described as being in the throes of a great convulsive struggle, nations warring against each other, kingdoms fighting one another, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, people fleeing to the mountains for refuge, others praying upon their housetops. And then the sun goes out into blackness, the moon no longer shines, the stars fall from their high places, and the very heavens tremble and seem on the point of collapse. But all at once the scene brightens. The judgment struggle is over. The bruised earth lies helpless and still. And then in Divine radiance appears the figure of the Son of man "coming in the clouds with power and great glory."

And our text states that with His Advent there is instantly a world-wide effort to gather together into a blessed company "the elect" who in this time of judgment have been scattered far and wide. To the uttermost parts of the earth, to the farthest boundaries of heaven angels are sent on their errands. East, west, north, and south they speed on their way, and presently they are seen returning, here with one, there with another, a chosen few brought together that they may form the nucleus of a new humanity - a new church.

When our Lord spoke the words set down in the thirteenth chapter of Mark, there remained but a few days before His rejection by men. It would be a heavy blow to His little band of followers. It would look as if He had failed, and His claim to being the promised Messiah, the Redeemer and Savior of men, would seem for the moment to be a bitter and ghastly mockery. His enemies would rejoice, thinking that they had rid the world of a blasphemous pretender, and would rest in the fictitious peace of the belief that this was the last that the world would ever see or hear of Him.

But the Lord in perfect quiet, resting on the Mount of Olives in the peace of the evening, with the twelve gathered about Him, looking over at the resplendent temple whose destruction He had foretold, related this parable of the Second Coming. For it is a parable, as much a parable as when in the Gospel of Matthew He draws the picture of Himself as the Son of man "and all the holy angels with him" judging over the nations, dividing the sheep from the goats. And when we think of this as a parable, and cease to interpret it as referring to a physical event, or to criticize and reject it as false science, we can find the meaning in it. When He uttered this parable of the Second Coming, He was looking into the future farther than human eye could see. He foresaw not only His crucifixion, but He saw what men would do to the church which His apostles would found. He foresaw that the love from Him, which He came to give, would not be received. Love to the Lord and the neighbor would grow cold in the hearts of men - the sun of spiritual life would be darkened. Faith in Him would be lost - the moon would not give her light. And all genuine knowledge of truth derived from the Word would be banished; the truths that serve as our guide in life would be cast forth - the stars would fall from

the heavens of the mind.

He foresaw that His work would apparently go for naught, and that His religion would seem to be passing away in a carnival of corruption and in an accumulation of false teachings, rendering the church as benighted as before He had revealed His truth. And yet, in spite of the falsification of His Word, in spite of the perversion of His love, He would live. He would return - not physically, but spiritually - by a new and fuller unfolding of His truth. A new day would dawn, a new age would begin, a new understanding of Him, more spiritual than before, would be made possible through the opening of the Word. Into a world doubting, unbelieving, perplexed, into a world where selfishness was rampant, where individuals and nations were seeking self-advantage, He would come. And then quietly, "without observation," but surely, after the old things had passed away and many a false dogma had breathed its last, He would come to His own in a new revelation of spiritual truth and in a new and deeper reception of Him in His Divine Humanity.

We are witnesses of these things. We are living in the very days when these things are being accomplished. It should be obvious that there has been a tremendous judgment. Christendom has been shaken to its foundations. Great changes in belief have come about. False teachings, ecclesiastical tyrannies, bigotries, and hypocracies have been uncovered.

The world we live in is far different from the world of two hundred years ago. Enormous energies - industrial, political, and moral - have been released. The peoples of the world are becoming more and more closely bound together, and it is becoming more and more clear that in a world community a free and happy life depends upon mutual cooperation and service. In the New Age the spirit of universal brotherhood is seen to be necessary to the preservation of civilization, and the belief in the universal Fatherhood of God is necessary to create the relationship of brotherhood. In other words, a belief in God and a knowledge of God must operate in the lives of men to make them brothers.

We need not look into the future to see the meaning of the words of our text. The judgment scene is being enacted now. In some circles and among some classes there is a religious revolt. Belief in God is ridiculed. Knowledge of God is said to be useless.

But belief in God is not merely a theological question; it is a practical question. The progress of the individual and of the nation depends above all things upon a knowledge of God and upon the belief that He does direct and control the affairs of men. It is because of a new revelation of God, through His Second Advent, that in the midst of the doubts and confusion of the day there is a new spirit abroad, a spirit of intellectual and spiritual liberty, a spirit of fraternity in which the peoples of the earth are being brought nearer together. There is not a form of human activity, there is not an industry nor a profession that is not feeling the breath of a new spirit blowing upon it.

We are in the beginning of a great reconstructive movement. And this is what is taking place: all things that are genuinely true and good are being brought together by the Lord as the elements in the upbuilding of a new humanity. In the inventions in which we rejoice, in the commerce, in the sociology, science, art, education, and religion of today, scattered through all this are elements of use and service which the Lord is directing and using to the upbuilding of a true human society. This work is far from being completed, but it is going on.

"And he shall send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven." True men and women are His angels, for the word "angel" means "messenger," and there is never a true man or woman filled with the Lord's spirit, who is working for the establishment

of righteousness, justice, and truth, who is not one of His messengers doing angels' work. This gathering together of the forces that uphold the good is what is meant by the search of the angels.

There are various levels of truth in the Word. It applies to the world at large and to that smaller world, the individual. For each man's life is a world in miniature and he is the heir of the ages. In the life of each one of us this same process of separating the good from the evil, the true from the false goes on. The Lord wishes to make to us His spiritual Second Advent, to bring about in us the dawning of a new day.

Let us not be afraid of the truth. First there is the judgment. We are apt to try to avoid this. It is sometimes hard to say of ourselves, "The standard according to which I think, judge, and act is false, the way of life that I find so pleasant is unworthy." It is so much easier to judge ourselves by lower standards, or not to judge ourselves at all, but simply to go on in a natural effort to get along in the world as pleasantly as we can. But let the judgment come. Let the vain and shallow things be blown away as chaff. Let the evil and false things be acknowledged as such and renounced, and then these prophecies of the Lord's coming as the spirit of truth will begin to be fulfilled.

If we live superficial, pleasure-loving lives, how can we be greatly influenced by Him? But let a man suffer the Lord's truth to judge him, and let him sincerely try to correct himself according to that judgment, and surely these words of the Gospel will be fulfilled in him: "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." We shall begin to understand the Word of God. Then will follow the other promise of the sending forth of the angels to gather "the elect" from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

Who does not see what this promise means? Translated, it reads like this: There is no experience in your natural life so remote or so obscure that the Lord will not gather out of it every least affection, thought, or deed that is good, and use it in building up your true nature. And there is no part of your spiritual nature so hidden, so sacred, or so little known to yourself that from it He will not bring together for you the elements of eternal life.

Any truth to which we have been true in any most humble duty, any good affection which we have put into the most commonplace deed, any principle to which we were loyal in temptation or sorrow, any ideal, any pure affection - these shall be searched for and brought together and formed into the Christian character which the Lord is ever seeking to develop in us.

How all-embracing are the terms: "from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven!" From the least to the greatest, from the earliest and most innocent impressions and beliefs of infancy and childhood to the wisest and maturest experiences of old age!

The lesson is: Let God be the Judge. Let the truths of His Word enlighten the mind, and let Him be a living reality in the heaven of the soul, and there is nothing that the infinite love and wisdom of the Lord will not do to weld together into a harmonious Christian life every least or greatest truth or good that you have made your own through love, faith, and obedience.