

Hope Realized

Cycle

B

Sermons Based on the Gospel
Lessons for the Advent, Christmas
and Epiphany Seasons



Robert E Glenn, Jr.

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Christmas, and Epiphany
based on the Gospel Lessons

Robert E. Glenn, Jr.

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*This book is dedicated to my loving and supporting
wife, Kate;*

my faithful children, Xander and Zoe;

*for all the Saints who have helped me get to this
place in life;*

*and to English Lutheran Church, Bluffton, Ohio —
for their support and belief in me.*

And for you, the reader of this book;

I pray it guides you on your journey with Jesus.

Thank you all!

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Preface

If you are reading this book, then I would assume that you are looking for insight into sermon preparation and presentation. This series involves preparation for the Advent season, Christmas, as well as Epiphany, the Lord's Baptism, and the Transfiguration.

My name is Robert E Glenn Jr. I have been in ministry for over 25 years. I have been a lay-Bible teacher, a worship leader, as well as senior pastor for three different congregations. My educational focus has been on linguistic and cultural aspects of the Bible, as well as the historical significance of its teachings. I have a B.A. in Biblical Studies from Bluffton University and am now a Seminarian at Wartburg in Iowa; I continue to learn as you do. I have written hundreds of sermons and still have much to learn.

The primary purpose of this preface is to give you some insight into how I approach the biblical narrative when preparing sermons and Bible studies. There are at least two techniques which are critical in writing for a modern audience: genuine exegetical work and contemporary application in our lives.

What do I mean by "genuine" exegetical work? The term "exegete" comes from the Greek roots which mean to lead "out of" the text/manuscript. This may seem elementary; however, this is not how many approach sermon preparation. We, as biblical scholars, must allow the word of God to speak to us. We must ask questions: what is our setting, who is speaking, what do the original words mean in context, how can we apply the words to our lives, and how does this lead us to Jesus? By "genuine" I mean that our own bias and opinion do not get in the way of our interpretation. I have seen many a sermon written for the theme and purpose of the speaker and not necessarily expounding on the word of God.

Your sermon also must be applicable to daily life. If we are hearers and not doers (James 1:22) then we cannot hope

to live out our calling through Jesus Christ. When we hear Jesus calling us to forgive our enemies and we say to ourselves, “He’s not talking to me”, then we are missing the purpose of the words. If we cannot put biblical teachings into practice, one must wonder what the purpose is in biblical knowledge. Therefore, a sermon must have a practical application, especially when addressing more challenging subject matter.

First Sunday of Advent

Mark 13:24-37 NIV

Hope

“But in those days, following that distress,
“ ‘the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ “At
that time people will see the Son of Man coming in
clouds with great power and glory. And he will send
his angels and gather his elect from the four winds,
from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon
as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you
know that summer is near. Even so, when you see
these things happening, you know that it is near,
right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will
certainly not pass away until all these things have
happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my
words will never pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not
even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the
Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when
that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He
leaves his house and puts his servants in charge,
each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the
door to keep watch.

“Therefore, keep watch because you do not know
when the owner of the house will come back —
whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the
rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do
not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I
say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

Context

We encounter Jesus speaking to his disciples in Jerusalem. They stand across from the temple on the Mount of Olives. One of Jesus' disciples marveled at the magnitude and scale of the Temple complex, "Look, at the magnificent buildings and stones!" Jesus responded with "they will all be torn down" — a curious answer for them to hear. Jesus then told them of the disasters they would witness in their lifetimes. Where could the disciples find hope, if their future and their Jewish identity looked so dim? Let us exegete today's gospel reading from Mark and see what we discover.

From The Prophet

Our pericope today begins with the words of the prophet Isaiah. He was speaking on the coming judgment which will befall Babylon the great, the country in which Isaiah (and Israel) were in captivity. The "Day of the Lord" is a consistent theme in the prophets, both greater and lesser. On this day the Lord issued righteous judgment on all flesh; an accounting of deeds was in order. Jesus was using this language to describe the future judgment that Israel would endure, and subsequently so would his disciples.

The Order Is Shaken

Jesus described the sun being darkened and the moon not showing its light; stars would lose their light, and the heavenly bodies would be shaken. This is a "de-construction" of creation. In the beginning (B'reshit)¹ God created the heavens and the earth, God set the heavenly lights in order; God spoke the seas, trees, and animals into existence. On the Day of the Lord, the natural order was in jeopardy; things were so intensely distraught that even creation felt it. Why? What could be so extreme that everything created was in trouble?

1 תִּשְׁאָרָב — Hebrew, the first word of the Bible. Means: "from" the "head", or as we like to say, "take it from the top" (beginning). Translated as Genesis.

It is the “coming of the Son of Man”. The term son of man is used in the prophetic voice in three contexts. First, “son of man” [Hebrew B’en Adam]² is what God called humanity in general (Job 25:6 or Psalm 146:3); it denotes weakness, especially compared to the Lord. Secondly, it is a term used to address the prophetic call for those who are called before the Lord into service, as in Daniel or Ezekiel. Lastly, but not dissociated from the others, is the name that Jesus gave himself, as righteous judge in the flesh — this is where we find ourselves today.

The Son of Man will come riding on the clouds in judgment. He will send out his “messengers”³ to all the corners of heaven and the earth to gather the elect [Gk ἐκλεκτός]. Jesus spoke much about this; whether in separating the sheep from the goats or the wheat from the chaff, there will be an accounting of humanity and its deeds (Matthew 25:31-46), and a reaping of such.

Be Vigilant

Jesus gave an example of how nature gives us indication of what’s to come: when the leaves of the fig tree are tender and start to flourish, then you know that summer is coming quickly. Likewise, there are signs on earth and in the heavens which give one warning of what’s to come. Indeed, the signs are upon them for those with eyes to see. It is not hard for me to detect a thunderstorm coming; I can hear it, see it, and even “feel” it.

Why Is Jesus Telling Us This?

The coming judgment is inevitable, but if you are prepared it will be better for you. Jesus told his listeners that they *would* be present at this prophetic judgment, so they will need to stay “awake” for these events. Do not fall asleep or let your guard down; everyone must remain diligent in their calling/duties

2 בֶּן־אָדָם — Hebrew. Son of Adam (man)

3 ἄγγελος (ang-gelos) — *angel* or properly *messenger*.

for the Lord. The Lord will come back as master of the household and will judge his servants based on their service to him.

We must read chapter thirteen of Mark, and its descriptions of “desolation” and judgment, with two sets of glasses. In one case, we must be fair to the historical realities of the time, for by the year CE 70 the very temple⁴ at which they were marveling would be destroyed. Here is some history on the matter — after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, his conquered realm was divided among his four main generals. The Seleucid dynasty ruled over Judea until the year 63 BCE. After this time, the Roman rule of Judea began.⁵ Judea had never been a compliant vassal of any nation, as the Romans soon found out. The First Jewish-Roman War (66-73 CE) displayed much of what Jesus was talking about his followers experiencing in their “generation” (v 30).

Secondly, we must read Jesus’ words with an eschatological⁶ viewpoint. This is the more common way of viewing the text today, as we have become more accustomed to “rapture” theology and “end-times” proclamation. There is always an element of past, present, and future with our God⁷; the three themselves being observable by the Lord simultaneously. In reference to our first discussion on creation being shaken, the end of all things (eschaton) would fit this description of creation being undone.

A Message Of Hope?

If you’re like me, by this point you are probably wondering how we can find a message of hope in today’s text. Perhaps we need to look at it differently. Imagine you are walking down

4 This was the second temple built by the refugees who returned from captivity in Babylon, led by Ezra and Nehemiah; completed around 515 BCE

5 In 63 BCE, Roman general Pompey conquered what remained of the Seleucid kingdom, effectively ending their rule and incorporating the region into the Roman Republic.

6 Literally, according to the Greek, “words discussing to the end of things”; the study of judgment, death, and eternity of humans (and of creation).

7 Revelation 1:4

a country road, and you encounter a car coming toward you from the other direction. If you know the bridge is out ahead of them, you would probably warn them: Hey, stop, be on guard. Stay alert! (v 33). Jesus was giving warning to his faithful followers that there was trouble coming. Just by making them aware, he gave them hope for a hopeless time.

I remember taking Christian Ethics in college. We looked at ethical dilemmas such as euthanasia, fetal termination, acts of violence, and uses of technology. These discussions were not comfortable for anyone (including the professor); however, they were extremely important. They made us think about the things we didn't want to think about. Why? To prepare us for certain ethical conflicts we would encounter in the future; and, most importantly, we would have a preconceived idea of our opinion and our next action.⁸

We also can find hope in the rest of Jesus' promises to the faithful throughout the gospels. In fact, in Luke's version of this pericope, Jesus told his followers to look up, for their salvation draws near.⁹ Even though Jesus would be hung on the cross and sacrificed for our sins, he has never forsaken us. Just because Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven, does not mean that he has left us behind or alone. And just because Jesus will come back as righteous judge upon all flesh, does not mean that he is not thinking about what is best for us. In fact, the section about gathering the "elect" from all the corners of the earth is about bringing us unto himself.

Life Application

So, let us not be afraid. Jesus gave us descriptions of things to come: destruction of the temple, moon to blood, the heavenly bodies would be shaken. Jesus told his disciples to be prepared, to stay awake, to be ready for the things to come; no matter how disconcerting they may be. The word of the prophets must be fulfilled, but do not let us lose heart; Jesus is the fulfillment of

8 The intention was not for us to "worry" about said things which might happen, but rather to be prepared for them.

9 Luke 21:28

the word. Be not afraid because he will be coming to gather his harvest, his faithful ones from the four corners of the earth. We must trust in the words of Jesus: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Plus, Jesus promises to never leave nor forsake us, even to the end of days. In the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20, Jesus promises to be with us until the end and beyond. After the destruction of the Temple, the hope for all believers is that the church (the Body of Christ) lives on, forever.

During this season of Advent¹⁰, we must remember that our hope remains in the resurrected Christ. That as the Lamb of God foretold in scripture, Jesus was meant to suffer and die for the sins of humanity. Likewise, we too suffer in this life, we experience hardships and death, just like Jesus. During this season of Advent, we anticipate the coming of our Savior, born of a virgin, humble in nature, God with us! We believe this; we trust in this; we put our hope in this.

Amen.

Application should be a larger portion of the sermon, since that is what the congregation needs to take the message and make it relevant. How are old prophecies and warnings something that we shouldn't be scared of? Is it because Christianity survived the destruction of the temple? Is it because the disciples were more concerned with the earthly kingdom and not the spiritual one, as we tend to be? How can I live my life more fully and in keeping with Jesus's plan knowing this information about the temple and creation deconstructing?

10 Remember that the word Advent comes from the Latin word, *Adventus*, which means the "coming of the Lord". During Advent we welcome the Christ to us, as baby, as Lord, and as the one who would come again.