

Trinity XXV

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen. In April of this year, a friend from college contacted me, telling me to get all my affairs in order because the end was drawing nigh, which made me laugh because I actually thought he was talking about my upcoming wedding.

But he wasn't talking about the end of my bachelorhood, which I was happy ended. He was actually talking about the end.

The end of all things as we know it. The end on the last day. And why did my friend believe that the end was nigh? Well, he believed it because on April 8th of this year, there was a total solar eclipse. And as we heard just in this morning's gospel, Jesus said that one of the signs of the end is that the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

However, April 8th of this year came and went. And here we are. Hopefully, still waiting for our Lord to return. Although there are many who have been deceived and who have actually given up all hope that our Lord will ever return, which in itself could also be interpreted as a sign of the end.

[1 : 3 3] Nevertheless, just because many false prophets and false Christs have come and gone, doesn't mean that the end will be immediate.

And neither does the fact that there was a total solar eclipse just last April. Yet, please, please do not misunderstand me.

I do believe that our Lord will return. I just don't know when. And neither does anyone else know when, except for God alone, and shame on anyone who tells you otherwise.

However, Christ's bodily returning to the earth to judge both the quick and the dead really, really is one of the pillars of our faith.

And even something we confess in the Nicene Creed each and every Sunday when we say, and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

[2 : 3 4] It's just that the signs pointing to our Lord's return can very, very easily be misinterpreted.

Take, for example, the words of this morning's gospel where we are told, immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Now, are these words meant to be taken literally?

And if so, were they also meant to be taken literally when any of the Old Testament prophets used them to describe several events other than the last day?

For regarding the fall of Babylon in 539 BC, the prophet Isaiah wrote, for the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light.

[3 : 3 4] The sun will be darkened and it's going forth and the moon will not cause its light to shine. And in regard to the fall of Samaria in 722 BC, the prophet Amos wrote, and it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, that I'll make the sun go down at noon and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.

And in regard to Egypt being overrun by Babylon for 40 years, the prophet Ezekiel wrote, I will cover the heavens and make its stars dark.

I will cover the sun with the cloud and the moon shall not give her light. And the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you and bring darkness upon your land, says the Lord God.

Yet when Babylon and Samaria fell, and when Egypt was overcome for 40 years, did at that time the sun, moon, and stars literally go dark?

I mean, is this just something that always happened in the ancient world? Whenever an empire fell, the sun, moon, and stars literally stopped shining?

[4 : 50] Or is this just apocalyptic language and figures of speech used to describe the downfall of a civilization?

For as far as I know, no one takes these verses in Isaiah chapter 13, Amos chapter 8, and Ezekiel chapter 32 literally.

But for some reason, there are many who take the same language literally in this morning's gospel. Nevertheless, in Matthew chapter 2, it does seem like the star of Bethlehem was literally a sign to the wise men that the Savior was born.

And in Genesis chapter 1, we do read that the good Lord created the lights of the firmament to be for signs and seasons and for days and years. So maybe there literally will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars on the last day.

And then again, maybe not. As Sigmund Freud once said, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. And to paraphrase Freud, sometimes a total solar eclipse is just a total solar eclipse.

[6 : 12] But regardless of whether a Christian is a premillennialist, a postmillennialist, a amillennialist, or whatever else millennialist, the entire Christian church does agree that one day our Lord will return to judge both the quick and the dead, and that we all must prepare ourselves for that great and glorious day by striving all the more to truly be faithful to him.

And yet as we do this, we should also keep in mind our Lord's warning. Then if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or there, do not believe it.

For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

Therefore, if they say to you, look, he is in the desert, do not go out. Or look, he is in the inner rooms, do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

So I guess the best thing, the best thing for all of us to do is to prepare for our Lord's coming at all times and to live every day as if it was the very last.

[7 : 41] Therefore, let us not wait for the sun to go dark, and let us not wait until it feels as if death is drawing near. Let us instead consider this day our sign and repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Lord Jesus Christ, he is coming.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.