

“Be ready, be forgiven!” Mark 13:1-8

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

Do you know when Jesus Christ is coming back in His glory, with all the angels to restore the goodness of His creation, to purify it from all sin, and evil and death and to gather His chosen people in His presence? Do you know it?

Would you like to know it? For we hear today “of wars and rumors of wars... think about events in Paris! Nations rise against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms. There are earthquakes in various places; there are famines.”

All sound so familiar. However, regardless of what we want the day and the hour is not revealed to us. In today’s reading Jesus speaks about the last times. It is not only these verses, but the whole chapter 13 is devoted to the same topic.

The last times. Now, what are we going to look at today? Obviously we can’t figure out the day and the hour, so we’ll focus on those parts of Jesus’ message which are relevant for us today.

First we’ll try to see how Jesus was looking at things, and how we are supposed to look at the world around us. Second, how should we prepare for the last times. How Jesus looked at this world, how we are supposed to do it, and how to prepare for the last times.

“As he [Jesus] came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

What do we see with our eyes? What does impress us? Great, mighty, expensive things. Look at big buildings in big cities! Look at skyscrapers! Aren’t they wonders of civilization? Impressive! They make us feel so tiny and insignificant.

Look at amazing achievements of humanity, some of them are breath-taking. Look what money, human reason and power can achieve. How can we not trust these things, which are so powerful?!

The temple in Jerusalem, build by Herod the Great was one impressive building, indeed. The walls around the outer court was 500 meters long and 300 meters wide. Temple itself was 50 meters high. Made of huge, huge stone blocks. The size of the temple was like 12 soccer fields together. That was one of the most impressive building projects in the ancient world.

However, Jesus wasn't impressed at all. 'All of this will be destroyed. There will not be left here one stone upon another.' It happened exactly as Jesus had foretold just 40 years later, when Roman army destroyed Jerusalem.

Do not put your trust on something that seems powerful and impressive in this world, be it wealth or power. The greatest empires have fallen, the mightiest rulers have died, they enjoyed a short period of glory and then sunk into oblivion.

Why wasn't Jesus impressed? Because He saw things in a different way. He saw the big picture of the world's history. And this is something that we as Christians are privileged to do. We can see the world, at least partly, the way Jesus did.

Think about it is, it is such a wonderful gift, God Himself shares with us knowledge which we couldn't obtain otherwise, He Himself reveals to us where we come from and where we are going. That's Him who makes you wise.

Seeing the world through Jesus' eyes really puts things in a different perspective. We have discussed it again and again, that there are four foundational event, four events with universal significance revealed to us in the Word of God.

The first one is ... yes, the Creation. Creation of the Universe and of the Earth. Then the second one is ... yes, the Fall, when first human beings turned their back to God and sin and death came into the world.

But because the creation was created very good, the Creator didn't want to leave it in the state of corruption, He promised to purify it from all corruption, from all sin and evil and to restore it in its goodness.

This is where we come to the third event, Christ event, His incarnation, that is, becoming a man, His life, death and resurrection. This is where the Creator fulfilled His promise to restore His good creation.

As Jesus Himself revealed He came into the fullness of times and by His death and resurrection fulfilled God's promises so many times revealed in the Old Testament through God's servants prophets.

What does still remain unfulfilled? Only one thing. The last big event that is revealed to us in the Scriptures. The second coming of Christ. The restoration of whole creation, when all sin and evil will be cleansed from God's creation.

This is how Jesus saw the story of the world. The creation, the fall, His first coming and His second coming. This is how we are also privileged to see the world. This is how it is summarized in the Creeds we say every Sunday.

Our lives are short, here they begin and there they are already over. Gone. We can't see much of the big picture of this world on our own. Not even as a humanity all together.

But not knowing the beginning and the end is like reading the book where beginning and the end are lost... you can't make much sense of it. This is where God's own revelations are so helpful for us.

They provide for us the big picture, they give us the sense of meaning and purpose not only for the history of the world, but also for our lives. We are not here by accident, we are under care and provision of Almighty God the Creator.

When it comes to the creation, we can observe that what we can grasp by our human reason by means of scientific research is gradually aligning with what the Creator Himself revealed already a long time ago in the Bible.

The same is true about the fall. To some extent we can even see in our own experience that our hearts are full of evil thoughts and desires. And we can't control them. We can stop them when they appear, but we can't stop them from appearing. Shameful thoughts, inappropriate desires passions... they all dwell here.

We know a lot about Christ's life, death and resurrection. He demonstrated before hundreds and thousands of eyewitnesses, that He is in control not only over nature, people, demons, sicknesses, but also over life and death. He is God in flesh.

But when we come to the last times, to the return of Christ, we have only His promises. Of course, we have a few glimpses of the world to come. Thus the apostle Paul had seen the paradise, even if He couldn't describe it. The same way there are testimonies in recent time; remember the movie "Heaven are for real."

I don't know whether you have thought about the Bible this way, but in a way it serves to show us how credible, how trustworthy the Triune God is. How determined to finish what He has started and how much in control over everything.

We could say that the whole Bible from the beginning till the end deals with God's promises announced and fulfilled. Announced and fulfilled. The most unbelievable and mysterious – His coming to us as a man Jesus, dying on the cross, and His resurrection as a testimony of what awaits His chosen people.

If we think about the Biblical story, if God is the Creator, that's reasonable that He creates the earth with all the richness of life on it. If He does it, it is also reasonable that He cares about His creation's wellbeing and would purge it from all evil.

What is unbelievable that He would become as one of us, to save us from destruction we are heading into, well deservedly, and would give up His life so that only we could live. This is what we can't comprehend.

But this is exactly what He did. For our sake. For your sake. If He fulfilled the most unbelievable of His promises, we can be more that sure that He will fulfill also the last one, His return and the restoration of His wonderful creation.

Now, where does it leave us? We looked at how to see the world through eyes of Jesus. Now what? Our second question – how should we prepare for the last times? What should we do? We can't know the day and the hour. But these can be scary times.

When Jesus spoke about the last times, throughout this chapter He repeatedly said 'be on guard', 'watch out'. The point is, and this is what He encouraged His disciples and also us, be ready all the time, be prepared!

Jesus in a way turned His disciples question about 'when this will happen' towards themselves – be prepared for this, be ready for this, you never know when this will happen. And this is so true for all of us.

We need to be prepared. For one thing is – Jesus' second coming, quite another, our departure from this life. We may live to experience the return of our Lord, but we may be called into His presence any minute. We don't know when.

How to be ready, - this is our real question. And the answer is very simple. Be forgiven. Be forgiven – that simple. You see, the whole reason for Jesus, the Son of God to come, die and rise again was to bring us forgiveness.

God's forgiveness is what save us from eternal destruction. If we are forgiven, then we are freed and purified from all our sins. If we say that we don't need it, if we say that we are not sinners we make God a liar and we reject what Jesus has done.

Remember a situation when you have done something wrong and your parents knew about it... how did you feel? What's a purpose to deny what they already know? What could we do? What did our parent expect us to do?

To admit, to confess what we had done, so that they could forgive us and restore our relationships, when all guilt is gone, and we are free to be together, honest one with another. This is exactly what our Father in heaven expects from us.

We evaluate what others say and do, the Triune God sees our hearts and desires. This is a totally different picture. He knows about our envy, anger, jealousy,

hatred, about our unwillingness to listen to Him, about our desire to be like gods ourselves, He knows about all situations when we could do good, but chose not to.

There are so many things you have done against His will, so many times you have offended Him and made Him angry, so many times you have hurt your neighbors, or denied them your help. How do you expect to hide it, or to make up for it?

Your Father already knows all of this, there is no reason to deny it. What He expects is honesty and repentance. He simply awaits for us to admit the reality. So that He could comfort us with words of forgiveness. 'I forgive you all your sins.'

Besides, just imagine what freedom it gives to you. You don't need to pretend before God, you can admit what you are, for you know – He knows you and accepts you as you are, and He longs to forgive you.

The next thing, once you realize that God knows you and forgives you, you are free in relationships with others. You can be honest about what you are, a sinner. You don't need to pretend before others that you are perfect, that everything is good in your live, that there are no sins or desires that burden you.

We are saints, but only because of Christ. On our own, we are sinners, broken and wounded, dependent of God's forgiveness. And because He so abundantly shares it we are free to be honest also among ourselves. We don't expect each other be perfect. We expect each other to be honest so that we can be forgiven.

We are free to take off masks of false piety, we are free not to use our sweet Christian voice, we are free to admit our failures and imperfections, and we are free to welcome others as they are, forgiven sinners, not perfect people.

This is how we get ready for Christ's return. He makes us ready. We come and bring to Him our dirt and ugliness, He gives us new hearts and eternal life. Once we realize that this is what to be a Christian is about, we can rejoice in God's forgiveness as in the greatest gift and treasure. Then we thirst to hear these words 'I forgive you all your sins' again and again.

And Jesus has organized that you can hear them again and again, so that your joy and freedom can overflow. You can hear them every Sunday, in the Absolution, in the Holy Communion, in the sermon.

If there are sins that torture you, and wouldn't leave you, you can hear these words in private confession and absolution. Everyone is invited. Use it! And you can confess your sins and burdens to your brothers and sisters as we all are sent to proclaim these words: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

We don't know the day and the hour, but when we are forgiven and when we have forgiven others, there is nothing for us to worry about, whatever happens in the world around us. We know who is in control and what is yet to come.

Then this day, the return of Christ, will be the day of greatest joy and celebration. You will go home, with your true Father, with your Savior Jesus Christ, and with your eternal family, your brothers and Sisters in Christ. This is our hope. This is our source of joy and peace.

Amen.