

February 3, 2013 by Steve Brandon



## Forecast of the Future

### Mark 13:14-27

#### 1. The Times Will Be Terrible (verses 14-19)

#### 2. The Elect Will Escape (verses 20-27)

Yesterday was February 2. It is often referred to as Groundhog's Day. According to folklore, if it is cloudy when a groundhog emerges from its burrow on this day, then spring will come early. If it is sunny, the groundhog will supposedly see its shadow and retreat back into its burrow, and the winter weather will continue for six more weeks.

Across the states, there are holiday celebrations where to watch the groundhog emerging from its burrow. None of the celebrations are bigger than what takes place in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. It is there that the media turns its special attention to determine whether or not the Groundhog sees its shadow or not. Although the town has only 6,000 residents, each year, thousands show up to watch Punxsutawney Phil, America's most famous groundhog, emerge from his hole.

Before the sun came up on Saturday morning, crowds began to gather. Buses transported people from remote parking lots to the Punxsutawney Phil's burrow. Early Saturday morning, Pennsylvania Lieutenant Governor Jim Cawley told the crowd, "This is the most important weather prediction to be found anywhere on the globe." [\[1\]](#)

Well, yesterday morning, shortly after sunrise, Groundhog Club president, Bill Deeley, dressed in a top hat and a tuxedo, had a few words with Punxsutawney Phil, and then proceeded to forecast the weather this spring. On their official website, we read the following:

On this February 2nd, 2013,  
the One Hundred and Twenty Seventh Annual Trek of the  
Punxsutawney Groundhog Club at Gobbler's Knob....

Punxsutawney Phil, the King of the Groundhogs,  
Seer of Seers, Prognosticator of Prognosticators,  
Weather Prophet without Peer,  
was awakened from his borrow at 7:28 am  
with a tap of the President's cane.

Phil and President Deeley conversed in Groundhogese  
and Phil directed him to the chosen Prognostication scroll.

The President tapped the chosen scroll and  
directed Phil's Prediction be proclaimed:

My new Knob entrance is a sight to behold  
Like my faithful followers, strong and bold

And so ye faithful,  
there is no shadow to see  
An early Spring for you and me. [\[2\]](#)

Now, I hope he's right! I'm ready for winter to be done soon. An early Spring would be a welcome sight. And yet, the groundhog didn't give us immediate relief. We still have some winter to endure.

In our text this morning, we will see Jesus Christ make predictions about the future as well. In some measure, His forecast is the same as the groundhog's prediction. The groundhog is predicting some weeks of winter. But, then the spring will come! This year he said it will come in less than six weeks! Jesus is predicting the same thing. He predicted some terrible times of trouble. But, then He predicted that Jesus would come and rescue His elect from the trouble.

Let's consider our text.

Mark 13:14-27

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that it may not happen in the winter. For those days will be a time

of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

"But in those days, 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 that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

"Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

Our focus this morning begins in verse 14. In these verses, we will see the terrible times. In these verses, we will see the coming of spring, when Jesus Christ returns for His people.

So, let's begin in verse 14. My first point is this, ...  
1. The Times Will Be Terrible (verses 14-19)

The terrible times begin with Jesus mentioning, "the abomination of desolation" in verse 14. Of all of the signs that Jesus gave of the end, this one is unique. All of the other signs that Jesus gave have occurred and continue to occur in our times.

In verse 5, Jesus told about the many who will come and try to mislead. This takes place all the time. There are many who are attempting to mislead you regarding the reality of Christ. In verse 7, Jesus told about wars and rumors of wars. This takes place all the time. Rare has been the time in history when there has not been any war going on. And yet, even in times of peace, there always seems to be rumors of war. In verse 8, Jesus told about earthquakes and famines. Earthquakes and famines have always been a part of history. In verses 9-13, Jesus told of the persecution that would come to those who believe in His name. Never has there been a time when this isn't true. Throughout the world, Christians have always been persecuted for their faith.

But, "the abomination of desolation" (mentioned here in verse 14) is different. This is referring to a specific event in history. Or, to be more accurate, several specific events in history. The abomination of desolation has taken place several times in history (and may take place again). But, it's not like the other signs that Jesus gives of the end -- deceptions and wars and earthquakes and famines and persecutions. Things that are simply too numerous to count. But, the "abomination of desolation" has only taken place a few times in history -- two, maybe three times. Furthermore, this sign is also unique because Jesus ties this event to a specific location in the world: "those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains."

Now, the big question is this, "to what does this refer?" Well, Jesus gives us a hint right here in verse 14. Let me read the entire verse and see if you can detect the hint. "When you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains" (verse 14).

Do you see it? Jesus says, "(let the reader understand)." At this point, I think that the New American Standard translation fails us. I have a red-letter edition of the Bible, which simply puts the words of Jesus in red. But, the parenthetical comment, "(let the reader understand)" is printed in black. If you have a New King James translation, you will see the same thing. The translators here have made a decision. They have thought that the words, "(let the reader understand)" were added by Mark to clarify what Jesus meant. But, I see no reason for this. We are deep in a long discourse of Jesus. I think it's best to take these words as the words of Jesus, just like the English Standard Version and the New International Version does.

In other words, Jesus said, "(let the reader understand)." I think that what He means by this is to "let the reader [of Scripture] understand what I'm talking about." Or, more particularly, "let the reader [of Daniel] understand what I'm talking about." Because, this phrase, "abomination of desolation" (or something very close to it) occurs four times in the book of Daniel. [3](#)

If we had the time this morning, we could open up the book of Daniel and look at each of these four passages. That's what I did this week. I read the book of Daniel, looking particularly at the meaning of these passages. I commend the exercise to you if you really want to understand what this means. But, for the sake of time, I'll give you the synopsis. Two of these references appear to speak about the desecration that took place just after the rise of Greece to power, several hundred years before the coming of Christ (Dan. 8:13; 11:31). One of the references appears to speak about the events that would take place near the time of the Messiah Himself (Dan. 9:27). One of them is unclear as to when it would take place (Dan. 12:13). It may be yet to come.

And so, as Daniel speaks about the abomination of desolation, he describes at least two occasions when this took place. And perhaps, a

third that might take place. And so, as Jesus speaks about the abomination of desolation, it may have taken place in the next generation. It may have a future reference. But, it's not something that continues all the time.

Now, when you want to figure out exactly what Jesus is talking about, you get a clue when reading the references in Daniel. In every instance, they all speak about the sacrifices being stopped. I believe that this fact alone ought to give us a clue as to the meaning of the "Abomination of Desolation" here in Mark 13, verse 14.

Now, let me ask you, what would cause the Jewish people to stop their sacrifices? Two things: complete apostasy, when they no longer believe. Or, physical impossibility, when the temple has been destroyed by the enemy.

Now, when apostasy takes place, sacrifices would simply die away as the temple comes into disrepair. This happened during the reign of Manasseh, one of the ancient kings of Judah. That's not the abomination of desolation. But, when a foreign nation comes and destroys the temple, then in the process of destroying the temple, they could easily defile the holy of holies -- the most sacred place of the Jews. And indeed, that's what took place on several occasions in the life of Israel as a nation. And in the process of stopping the sacrifices, the holy place of God was defiled, which I believe is the abomination of desolation.

For instance, consider what happened in 175 B. C. A man named Antiochus Epiphanes rose to power in the region of Syria. In 170 B. C., he enacted a law that required all citizens to present themselves four times a year to pay formal homage to himself as the senior god of the Seleucids. The Jews, of course, hated such a law and rebelled against it. To squash the rebellion, Antiochus Epiphanes entered Jerusalem in 168 B. C. He proceeded to the temple and sacrificed a pig on the Jewish altar. Then, he erected another altar to Zeus on top of the Jewish altar, thereby defiling the holy place.

At this point, the Jewish sacrifices were stopped. This is exactly what Daniel 8 had predicted would take place, calling it a "transgression of horror!" In fact, so accurate is this prediction of the future, that many liberal scholars believe that Daniel must have been written after this took place. But, Daniel clearly tells us that he lived before the Jewish return to Babylon, which took place near 600 B. C., several hundred years before the things about which Daniel wrote. The same event was referred to in Daniel, chapter 11 as well.

And here in Mark 13, Jesus tells His disciples that they will see this take place. And indeed, something similar took place a mere 40 years after Jesus said these things. In 70 A. D., the Romans came and sacked Jerusalem. They defiled the holy place and destroyed the temple.

Josephus tells of how the Romans came and made sport with the altar of the Jews. They elected for themselves a mock high priest, named Phannias. Josephus said that "He was a man not only unworthy of the high priesthood, but that did not well know what the high priesthood was." They adorned this man with sacred garments and hailed him as the high priest. [\[4\]](#)

The priests, who beheld the mockery of these things, shed tears and lamented at how the holy place was being defiled. At one point, a Jew arose and attempted to stop the wickedness that was taking place in the temple. He was killed in right there in "the middle of the temple". [\[5\]](#)

Listen to the testimony of Ananus, a former high priest. He said, "Certainly it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or these sacred places, that ought not to be trodden upon at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains". [\[6\]](#) Ananus went on to speak about how the Romans came broke in upon the sacred customs of the Jews in the temple. [\[7\]](#) In Acts 21:28 we saw how stirred up the Jews in Jerusalem could become if they thought that a Greek had come into the temple! They were ready to kill Paul for doing this (though, in fact, he didn't). As the Romans came in and out of the temple area, it would have been a tremendous sacrilege from the perspective of the Jews.

I believe that this is what Jesus had in mind in verse 14, when He spoke of the abomination of desolation. I say this, in part, because of Luke's version of the Olivet discourse. Luke 21:20 reads, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand". And when was Jerusalem surrounded by armies? In 70 A. D., when the Romans attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. And so terrible was this that Jesus told those in Jerusalem at the time to flee. Look again at verse 14, ...

Mark 13:14

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains."

Verses 15 and 16 continue the theme, ...

Mark 13:15-16

The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat.

In other words, things will be so bad that you simply need to get out of dodge. And fast. And this actually took place.

I'll tell you one story about a group of Jews, who bolted from Jerusalem as the Roman armies came in. They headed out to a place in the wilderness called, Masada. Now, Masada is a huge rock plateau, down near the Red Sea. On the eastern edge of the plateau, the cliffs reach up to a high of 1,300 feet. On the western edge, the cliffs are about 300 feet tall. The top of the plateau was about 20 football fields in area. Every single approach to this plateau is a difficult climb.

In the first century B. C., it was made into a fortress. Twelve-foot stone walls were erected around the perimeter of the plateau. Several high

towers were built. Storehouses were made and filled. Arms were stored. Large boulders were stored to be able to drop down on those attempting to attack the city. Huge cisterns were hewn, to keep rainwater. In a day without helicopters or planes, the fortress was impenetrable.

During the days of Jesus, Herod had decked the place out. It was full of supplies. It had a spa, a bathhouse, a palace, and plenty of room for people to live. He fortified it because he was so paranoid that he would be overthrown. He wanted a nice place of refuge.

It so happened that when the Romans descended upon Jerusalem, a group of Jews fled the city. They headed southeast to Masada. Somehow, they were able to overpower the unsuspecting Romans who were stationed on guard at the time. And there they sat, 967 Jewish rebels resisting the entire Roman Empire.

Rome didn't take it lying down. After Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A. D., they turned their attention to these Jewish rebels camped out on top of Masada. It took some 15,000 Roman troops to attack them. The only way to have any hope of capturing them was to build a siege ramp along the western side, where the cliff wasn't quite so tall. And so, they built this enormous ramp leading up to the wall. It is still there today. From the best that I can tell, it was about 150 yards long. It ramped up several hundred feet. It was a massive project. It took the Romans some three years to build the ramp. All the while, they would face the onslaught of rocks being thrown down from above, seeking to discourage them in their work.

And I'm sure that as each day progressed, the Roman soldiers became more and more incensed by the rebels on top of the plateau, longing to see their revenge. Finally, in the spring of 73 A. D., they reached the wall and built a large siege tower and began to pound the wall with a battering ram, day and night. Eventually, the wall was breached. And the night before the Romans were able to penetrate Masada, the Jews decided to commit suicide during the night instead of being tortured and becoming Roman slaves. They set all of the buildings on fire, except for the food storehouses so that the Romans might see that they had enough food to survive. Only seven of the rebels survived: two women and five children. [\[8\]](#)

I tell that story not to glamorize their death or to justify their actions. I tell the story that you might see how strong was the resolve that the Jews had against the Romans and how important it was to flee, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20). Jesus had great compassion upon those who would live to see these things. Verse 17, ...

Mark 13:17-18

But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that it may not happen in the winter.

Fleeing to the mountains is a difficult thing. Being pregnant would make it especially difficult. Being in winter would make it cold and miserable.

Verse 19 describes the extent of the tribulation in those days, ...

Mark 13:19

For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will.

Indeed, the times will be terrible (verses 14-19). Jesus said that the tribulation that would be faced in the city of Jerusalem would be worse than the tribulation that anyone would ever face for all time. Certainly, this can't mean that more people would die, for in the holocaust of World War II, six million Jews were put to death. During the reign of Stalin, some twenty million people were systematically murdered. The destruction of Jerusalem never came close to these numbers. But, the suffering was great! Josephus describes the suffering that took place in his book, "The Wars of the Jews." It is incredible suffering

During this siege, the Romans came upon the city and surrounded it, cutting everybody inside off from the outside world. As a result, a famine broke out in the city, which turned family members against family members, as they sought for food. They would do terrible things to each other to get a confession as to where the food was being stored. The suffering of famine was so bad that they "invented terrible methods of torments to discover where any food was, and they [would] stop up the passages of the privy parts of the miserable wretches, and to drive sharp stakes up their fundamentals; and a man was forced to bear what it is terrible even to hear, in order to make him confess that he had but one loaf of bread, or that he might discover a handful of barley-meal that was concealed; and this was done when these tormentors were not themselves hungry". [\[9\]](#)

Many of the Jews, therefore, attempted to escape the city, but this was well nigh impossible, as the Romans were stationed all around the city. But, they were often captured by the Romans. Once captured, they were whipped, and "tormented with all sorts of tortures ..." and then were crucified in front of the wall of the city. [\[10\]](#) They were doing this to some 500 Jews each day that they had captured. Titus, the Roman general in charge of the destruction of Jerusalem, allowed this to continue on because "he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight." Josephus wrote, "the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies". [\[11\]](#) In other words, they didn't have enough crosses to crucify those who were caught trying to flee Jerusalem.

Josephus describes the situation of those in Jerusalem, "The noise also of those that were fighting was incessant, both by day and by night; but the lamentations of those that mourned exceeded the other; nor was there ever any occasion for them to leave off their lamentations, because their calamities came perpetually one upon another" [\[12\]](#) In other words, as constant and loud as the fighting was, the cries of agony

exceeded it. When Josephus looked back at the war as a whole, he said, "That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world". [\[13\]](#) He continued, "... it appears to me that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews are not so considerable as they were". [\[14\]](#)

This is almost an exact description of the words of Jesus in verse 19, "For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will."

Enough of the bad news. The Times Will Be Terrible (verses 14-19) Let's look at the good news.

## 2. The Elect Will Escape (verses 20-27)

In verses 20-27, we see "the elect" identified for us on three occasions.

Mark 13:20

Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Mark 13:22

for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

Mark 13:27

And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

You have to ask yourself, "Who are these 'elect'?" Are they politicians or something? No, these are the ones whom God chose before the foundation of the world to believe in Him. They are chosen, because God has chosen them. God has chosen to be gracious to them. God has granted them faith. God has granted them repentance. God has opened their eyes to the glories of the gospel. God has changed their hearts.

The elect are Christians. They are those who have placed their faith in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sins. They aren't trusting in their own righteousness. Rather, they are trusting in the righteousness of another. And as Jesus forecasts the future, we see a bright future for the elect. They will escape the coming judgment. Notice how the Lord cares for His people. Verse 20, ...

Mark 13:20

Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

In other words, as terrible as the times may be, God knows what is taking place. It hasn't escaped His notice. And for the sake of the elect, God will temper the suffering. If God had not shortened the time of the siege of Jerusalem, there may have been absolutely no survivors. But, for the sake of the Christians in the city, who are here identified as "the elect," God shortened the suffering.

Now, this doesn't mean that God will always protect the elect from death. Many have been martyred for their faith. For those at the church in Smyrna, God told them to "be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). But, even the martyrs haven't escaped the sovereign plan of God. In Revelation 6:11, we are told that God would not put forth His final wrath upon the earth until "the number of their ... brethren who were to be killed ... should be completed."

In other words, God has decreed a certain number of individuals to be martyred for their faith. The end will not come until they all have been killed for the sake of Christ. We see some of them appear in Revelation 7, coming out of the "great tribulation" to stand before the Lord with their robes washed white in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 7:14).

Yet, here Jesus promises that the days will be shortened for the sake of the elect (verse 20). This ought to give us great comfort. God is mindful of us in our times of distress. When the Romans were pouring out their wrath upon those in Jerusalem, all of it was done under the watchful eye of God. He observed the atrocities that were going on in the city of Jerusalem. Nothing escaped His notice. He was mindful of His chosen ones, whom He had chosen from the foundation of the world unto salvation. He wasn't going to sit by and let them be destroyed. Rather, God "shortened the days" to save some of His people from certain death.

Difficult days may indeed be ahead of us. Tribulation may well come upon us. Jesus promised it. Though I believe that these words were fulfilled historically in the next generation, it doesn't mean that we, as Christians, ought to think that it cannot happen again. This is the way that prophecy works. There are often multiple fulfillments. What took place in the days of the apostles may very well come upon us as well in some measure. In fact, the Lord promised that we will have tribulation. He said, "In the world, you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

This is the great blessing of following Christ. Through the tribulations and trouble, God is there to help.

In verses 21 and 22, we see God's further care to the elect, ...

Mark 13:21-23

And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

The picture here that Jesus paints is of deception. People are being led astray by false Christs and false prophets. There are many who are convinced that these men are the real deal. They are out spreading the word about their false-Christ (verse 21). "I have found the Messiah! Come here and I'll show Him to you."

Now, these false Christs and false prophets are amazing. It's not like they don't deceive people without reason. They show great signs and wonders that dazzle the crowds (verse 22). And people come to think, "This man must be a prophet! Just look at the wonderful signs that he does!" Jesus says that many will be deceived by these men (verse 6). But, not the elect. It is not possible for the elect to be led astray by a false teacher.

That's what Jesus says in verse 22: "for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect." God is so working in our lives that He is working in our minds to keep us following after the true Christ. So, let us take heed to the words of Jesus (verse 23). He has told us everything in advance that we might know the forecast of future events.

Here's the deal about following false Christs. Nobody is going to have to tell you when the real Christ comes on the scene! No, all you need to do is look to the heavens. Jesus said, ...

Mark 13:24-26

"But in those days, 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 that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

This is filled with references to the Old Testament. Jesus is merely quoting from what the prophets have said concerning His return.

The idea here is that it is very public. When Jesus returns for His people, all the world will know! They simply need to look to the sky. When Jesus returns, we will see the sun darkened. When Jesus returns, we will see the moon not giving forth its light. When Jesus returns, we will see the stars falling from the sky. When Jesus returns, we will see Jesus returning in the clouds. That's why the elect aren't deceived. Because, we all know that we will see the coming of Christ. We don't need anybody to tell us, "Behold, here is the Christ."

Though the world and the rulers of the world may shake their fists at God in defiance, God has established His anointed one on the throne (Psalm 2). Everything is doing fine in His hand. Jesus will return again for His people. He will do so with a great display of His power.

And I'm not sure about you, but I'm for the one who can darken the sun and moon and make the stars fall from the sky. I believe that these things will literally take place. The darkening of the sun won't be an eclipse. This won't take place in billions of years from now when the sun finally burns all up. This will take place when Jesus quenches the light of the sun, much like we blow out a flickering candle. I don't know how the stars will fall from the sky. That is way beyond me. But, if Jesus can darken the sun like a candle, then certainly, He can darken the night skies as well.

We have no difficulty in watching a 40 year old man blow out 40 candles in a single breath. Why should we have difficulty in the creator of the world quenching the lights of the sky that He created with His word.

When we read of the creation account in Genesis 1, we read, "God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). It is almost as if the stars were an afterthought! It's similar here in Mark 13: "He will quench the light of the sun. He will quench the light of the moon. And the stars also" (paraphrase of verses 24 and 25). Do you see the power of Christ's return?

He is going to come "with great power and glory" (verse 26). In verse 26, Jesus was referring to Daniel 7:13, in which Daniel refers to the day in which Jesus is given a kingdom forever. Here is what Daniel wrote,

Daniel 7:13-14

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.

And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

When Jesus says that He will appear again on the clouds, coming "with power and great glory," He is saying that He is the sovereign one to whom the world will give an account! There are many today who simply don't believe the words of Jesus. "Sure," they say, "He existed." "Sure," they say, "He was a fine teacher." " Sure," they say, "He did many good things." "But He is like anybody else! He certainly wasn't God. I'm not accountable to Him. He certainly won't return." But, there will be a day in which Jesus will prove these people wrong! When Jesus comes, all will know that it is Him!

Such is the power of His return. Do you see the care of His return? This comes in verse 27, ...

Mark 13:27

And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

Again, we see the elect being mentioned. The angels will gather them together. They will escape the wrath of the judgment of Christ. I believe that Jesus is speaking here about the rapture of the church. It's the time when the church is "caught up together ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). Christ is coming down for judgment, but "His elect" are being taken out of the world before the world is destroyed. The good news is that "God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:8).

When Jesus Christ returns to take His church, all will know. Verse 27 is a rescuing verse. The angels don't gather the elect to see them destroyed. The angels gather the elect to preserve them alive. Those who are left upon the earth will face His judgment. In the book of Revelation, when John spoke of these things, he described people hiding in caves, pleading for the rocks to fall on them. They say, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16-17).

This is the great reality of all life. You have a meeting scheduled. You don't know when it will be. You don't know where it will be. But you have a scheduled meeting with Jesus Christ to account for your life. Those who are gathered by the angels to be with Jesus "shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Those who are left on the earth will be destroyed by His wrath, physically by death and spiritually in hell forever.

Where do you want to be on that day? I want to meet Jesus in the clouds. I don't want to be left on the earth. It is how you respond today that determines where you will be on that day.

If Christ has become your refuge and you are trusting in the cross alone for your salvation, then you will be forgiven and will live with Jesus forever. But, if you have rejected Christ and your life obviously demonstrates that fact, then you will be left on the earth to suffer for a season, and then be sent to hell forever.

These are glorious words. And yet, these are sobering words. As a believer in Christ, there is no need to fear the second coming of the Son of Man. When He comes, He has a purpose: to rescue and to destroy. If the military is on your side, it is a joy to see men wearing fatigues and carrying machine guns. It is a joy to see the tanks roll into town. But, if you are fighting against the military, it is a day of dread when you see these very same things.

The believer loves His appearing, because He loves the king! "In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). Do you long for (and love) His appearing?

I remember in college eagerly longing for a day to come. For my undergraduate work, I attended Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. One of the long-standing traditions at Knox is the celebration of "Flunk Day," which takes place one day each spring.

My guess is that this has been taking place for some 50 years. The idea is that you should take a day in the semester when you simply decide that you will "flunk." People will often call this "senior skip day." However, it's more than you alone. It's more than the seniors alone. It's the entire college, faculty and all!

On that day, all classes are cancelled. All scheduled activities are cancelled. And it's a party! It goes all day long! Those who plan the party will often bring in various things for entertainment. There are often movies that play throughout the day. Lunch and dinner are special outdoor bar-b-cues. There are often carnival activities.

I remember one year, a Ferris wheel being brought to campus. They organized big tug of war matches across mud-pits. They organized giant water fights. They have had inflatable swimming pools brought in that are filled with soapy suds. I remember loud music. All day long, you greet your fellow students by saying "Happy Flunk Day!" to them.

But the catch is this. You don't know when it will be Flunk Day. It's planned by only a handful of students. They set the agenda. They plan the party. Nobody else knows when it will be, not even the president of the college. What's more is that you don't even know who the students planning Flunk Day are. It's all very secretive.

Now, Flunk Day would always start at 4 o'clock in the morning. People, who we called "friars" would begin running around campus outside at 4am, blowing whistles and yelling at the top of their lungs, "Flunk Day." The bell in the tower of Old Main would begin to ring. Schedules are handed out for the day, listing all of the activities of the day. Big banners are put up. It was this massive party that went from 4am until late at night.

Now I want for you to think about what this did to us students. During the entire Spring semester, a legitimate conversation starter was "So, when do you think that Flunk Day will be?" I remember at times, people studying the school calendars that were put out. They looked at the athletic calendars. They looked at the theatre schedules. They looked at the schedules of other special events, all trying to figure out which days the "friars" had selected as target days for Flunk Day. This was a bit tricky, because special events were easily cancelled. I remember one time a political science professor was flown across the country to lecture on a certain topic one certain. But low and behold, it was Flunk Day. Needless to say, this professor didn't deliver his lecture, because everything is cancelled on Flunk Day.

On several occasions, I remember some students, who thought that they figured out when Flunk Day was. The night before, they started to party. They didn't do their homework. They sat around, listened to music, played cards, and enjoyed their alcoholic beverages. Only to find out that it wasn't Flunk Day. Boy were they disappointed when they found out that they actually had class on that day (though, as I remember, they didn't attend class the next day as they were in no condition to pay attention).

I remember doing some studying and thinking about the possibilities of having Flunk Day the next day. I remember waking up around 4am, thinking that I would hear those magic whistles and the bell tower ringing. But they never came and I was a bit disappointed to attend class the next day.

I remember on several occasions having a Flunk Day scare. Some students ran around campus at 4am, blowing whistles and yelling "Flunk Day! Flunk Day!" Quite a few people got up, thinking that it was Flunk Day, but it soon became obvious that it wasn't Flunk Day. Nobody knew what was going on. There weren't any schedules or big signs someplace saying "Happy Flunk Day." The bell on Old Main wasn't ringing. And so, everybody went back to bed when they figured out that it was a hoax.

I remember one year, the "friars" decided to begin Flunk Day at 5am, rather than the customary 4am. It was late in the semester and there weren't any other days that could possibly be Flunk Day. And so, many people had anticipated it and were up at 4am. But, when there were no whistles and no activities, things died down. Until 5am, when the festivities began in earnest.

Every spring, I receive an email from the Knox College Alumni Relations on Flunk Day. Here's what I received on year.

"Happy Flunk Day!

Yes, it's Flunk Day... music is streaming from windows and balconies across campus, and students are outside enjoying this beautiful April morning. We hope you can get away from the daily grind, go outside, celebrate Spring and enjoy your own special Flunk Day. If not, take a mental break for a few minutes and reminisce about Flunk Days of the past."

When you think about the return of Christ, do you have a longing for that day? Does it stir your soul? Do you look forward to this day?

The return of Christ upon earth is called "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). The Bible tells us that the true citizenship of any believer is not here upon the earth, but in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Those who trust Christ have "a better and an abiding" possession awaiting them in heaven (Heb. 10:34). Paul said that there is a "glory" to be revealed that far exceeds any difficulties of suffering that we might experience here upon the earth (Rom. 8:18). When Christ comes back, He will take us home to a better place! He will care for His elect!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 3, 2012 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-groundhog-day-2013,0,6260336.story>

[2] <http://www.groundhog.org/>

[3] Daniel 8:13; Daniel 9:27; Daniel 11:31; Daniel 12:11.

[4] Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4:3:8

[5] Ibid, 4:5:4

[6] Ibid, 4:3:10

[7] Ibid, 4:3:10

[8] See Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 7, chapter 8-9.

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[9] Josephus, Wars of the Jews 5:10:3

[10] Wars of the Jews, 5:11:1

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid, 5:1:5

[13] Ibid, 5:10:5

[14] Ibid, Preface, paragraph 4