

Everybody loves an upset. Well, everyone except the favored team, of course. But we love it when the underdog takes everyone by surprise. We love it when the team that everyone was dismissing suddenly rises up and takes the championship. They talk about it for decades. They make movies about it. Everyone involved looks back on it as a defining moment in their lives.

I guess we love the great upsets because they give us hope when the odds are stacked against us, too. We love those stories because we ourselves so often feel like underdogs. We love the big upsets because we're always hoping that we ourselves will take people by surprise, that there's some hidden and extraordinary talent deep inside of us that people haven't acknowledged, that somehow, someday, we, too, might just win, despite having such a powerful enemy.

Well, I have good news for you. It's going to happen. I know it always looks like we're losing. It always seems like evil has the upper hand. The enemy is powerful, smart and practiced. He has an army of trained warriors. He has the whole world as his ally, and even our own flesh betrays our cause with its lust for sin. And we've lost the battle against our sinful flesh and its allies so many times before.

But it's coming. **The Great Upset** is coming! I am here to tell you that The Day is coming when **1. Evil finally falls**. The Day is finally coming when **2. The elect stand victorious!**

I can't wait. I can't wait for that day to come! I so sympathize with the wording our Savior used in Mark 13:24: "*But in those days, following that distress.*" I mean, I can't say that I understand that distress the way the disciples did, but I still sympathize. For them Jesus was talking about being arrested for being Christian, being flogged and being imprisoned. He was talking about the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, which was truly horrifying for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and truly unequalled by anything we have experienced.

Nonetheless, I believe I can say that I sympathize. I may not know what it feels like to live through a Roman siege or state-sponsored persecution, but I still know some of the distress that

Jesus is talking about. Even without a life-threatening persecution to live through, I still know *tribulation*, which is the word you find in Revelation as a translation for the word *distress* in Mark.

And some of you may be aware that *tribulation* is a buzzword among people who are counting down to the days to a Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth, but that's got nothing to do with this. I've got to make that clear not only to all of you assembled here in the church, but to anyone who hears this over the radio or reads about it on the internet or anything. The immediate context for this tribulation is the events leading up to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. The wider context is the tribulation that Christians have experienced in their struggles against this hostile world ever since that time, as well. Just read Mark 13 and the parallels from Matthew 24 and Luke 21 for yourselves. We're talking about a tribulation here that has already taken place and is continuing to take place. That's why every generation feels like the End is close at hand. These words are here to remind us of our own times as well as times passed, so that we always feel the End is imminent, and so that we are therefore always prepared for it.

Just as the disciples of the past saw evil winning through arrests and executions, so we see evil winning today in the way that those who take the Bible literally are so quickly dismissed these days. If you take it so literally as to actually honor God's Word regarding the order of gender roles and regarding sexual relations only within the context of a one-man-one-woman marriage, well, then, you are regularly mocked and despised on television, in print and in the movies. You're a bigot for calling sin a sin.

But you should also be aware of the part of the struggle against sin that hits much, much closer to home. You should know that struggle because you are so intimately and horrifyingly connected with one of Satan's most powerful allies: Your own sinful heart. And if you don't recognize that deadly coldness at work in your own flesh, then, believe me, it's not because you've overcome your sinful flesh. It's because your sinful flesh has blinded you while it sows the seed of hypocrisy in your life.

There's no denying the truth. That's why I paint a bleak pic-

ture of our condition as sinners in a sinful world. On the other hand, the other reason I paint such a bleak picture is to put the victory of the underdog on the Last Day in its proper perspective. In other words, I paint a bleak picture so that you may see just how miraculous and glorious *your* victory in Christ is going to be!

I had said earlier that this text is about a great upset, and indeed it is. We are right to paint the general situation of things as very, very bleak, for that is the way that God himself describes things, with death and corruption permeating every aspect of life in this broken world. Meanwhile, Satan takes advantage of the sinful flesh in all of us to cultivate the seed of distrust toward God and selfishness toward each other. The world grows more and more evil and we mourn as our sinful flesh plays its own part in the corruption. Evil seems to have the upper hand at every turn!

And yet it doesn't have the upper hand, and that's the point. Evil looks like the great champion now, but this terrifying Goliath is in for a great fall. People say that you might as well give in to evil urges, but they're betting on the wrong team. Evil will finally fall. It's a given. Evil will finally fall!

When Christ returns, he is going to eliminate every supposed advantage that Satan seems to have, even the corruption that has become a part of the fabric of the very universe itself! *"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.'"*

Do you see it? It is true that the corruption of sin has become a part of this very universe. Just read Genesis 3 and Romans 8; it has permeated the very make-up of Creation! But those who bet on evil to win and give in to the urgings of their sinful flesh are forgetting that God is still more powerful than anything in this universe. They are forgetting that God's Word, which seems to be stuck in a losing battle as everyone and everything "progresses" down the path of godlessness, has the power to take this universe apart, disassembling whatever power stands opposed to it!

"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." Yes, they will see the Carpenter

from Nazareth, whom they thought they could destroy through their evil plotting, alive and glorious, returning in the 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."*

That's the victory. Do you see it, brothers and sisters? It is the Great Upset, the Saints Triumphant. The Son of Man will return in power and glory. Evil will finally fall, and the elect will stand victorious!

But how do you know? I mean, you know Jesus will win. Not even death could hold him down. But how do you know that *you* will win with him? How do you know that *you* will be among the Saints Triumphant? How do you know that *you* will stand with him on the Day of His Victory despite the fact that you have given in to the tide of evil that not only flows at you but even from you, right out of your own naturally sinful heart?

It's that little word *elect*. It means *chosen*. It doesn't mean that you first chose him. In that case, credit for the victory would be ours, and we know that it isn't. The word *elect* means "those who *have been* chosen." And how do I know that I can count you in that elite group when you have so often failed under trial?

I know because I know so well that God sent me here today to say to you who are gathered here, "I forgive you." I know because God brought you here, and I know because he gave me this message of forgiveness to share with you, a message that is backed up by the sacrifice and resurrection of the Son of Man himself. If it was valuable enough to pay the debt the world owed, then it is valuable enough for you: My friend, your sins are forgiven.

What we have here, you see, is a preview of the glorious gathering that the angels will perform in every corner of the earth. Angels are messengers, but today it is the power of the Message itself that has gathered us together. Sin has already lost because the Message of Forgiveness through Christ's death and resurrection has stolen sin's power to condemn. Therefore I know evil will fall. I know because it already has. I know because his forgiveness has forever marked us as Saints Triumphant. Amen.