

## The Last Days (Part 3) -- Mark 13:24-27

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

*Lord, we need You just now. We are human and sinful. But we come just as we are. Do for us what we can't do for ourselves. Change us on the inside to live like Jesus lived. May every person here gain a real and meaningful connection with You as we study Your Word together. In Jesus' name, amen.*

We all know what it's like to lose electricity and have the lights go out, don't we? It's a part of life. Many of you remember the 2003 Northeast Blackout 10 years ago. It was the largest blackout in our nation's history. It reminded us of how delicately balanced our electrical grids and connections are. Some of you may have witnessed the blackout during the Super Bowl last year. All the lights went out in the stadium before the second half started. These lights are not always dependable.

Have you ever seen a black-out of the sun? Maybe a solar eclipse? Something comes between us and the sun, whether it's the moon or volcanic ash. But the sun is always there, right? There's a song entitled "I Will Be Here" by Steven Curtis Chapman. Do you remember how it starts?

*"Tomorrow morning if you wake up,  
And the sun does not appear,  
I, I will be here."*

Can you imagine what it would be like to wake up and the sun never appeared? That would be a bad day! (Actually, it would be a bad night☺) In our Scripture today there's a Light that will still shine even when the sun stops shining.

Today's Scripture is part of a series on the last days from Mark 13. In Mark 13:5-22 Jesus has made a series of predictions. We will review those now and then look at two more predictions that Jesus makes in today's Scripture in Mark 13:24-27. First of all, Jesus predicted that people would come pretending and claiming to be Jesus Christ (Mark 13:5-6; 21-22). They would come prematurely. Their purpose would be to deceive. Jesus made a second prediction in Mark 13:7-8: successive wars and conquests. One nation would rule only to be conquered by another. Over and over this has been repeated. Third, Jesus predicted that there would be natural disasters (Mark 13:8). He specifically mentioned earthquakes and famines. A fourth prediction found in Mark 13 is that of persecution (Mark 13:9-13). The disciples and other Christians would be mistreated, betrayed, and put to death. Fifth, Jesus predicted that the gospel would be preached to all nations (Mark 13:10). This comes at the heart and center of all of Jesus' predictions. It is the one that should captivate the attention of God's people.

A sixth prediction of Jesus is that of a great apostasy (Mark 13:14). God's temple and His truth would be trampled down. We saw from Luke's account of this prediction (Luke 21:20) that this included the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70 AD. Seventh, Jesus predicted that there would be a great persecution of God's people (Mark 13:19). This is distinguished from his earlier prediction of persecution by the fact that it would happen over a thousand years in the future and would be more severe and longer in duration than any previous persecution. There are two more predictions found in our Scripture today. Number eight is judgment on unbelievers (Mark 13:24-26). This judgment will come in the form of signs in the heavens. And we will look at this in more detail in just a minute. The last and ninth prediction is found in Mark 13:27 and describes a great deliverance for God's people.

Let's now look more closely at Jesus' eighth prediction - judgment on the unbelievers. Let's read Mark 13:24-26 (Read). This is not the first time in the Scriptures that God predicted the signs in the heavens. There are several other places in the Old and New Testaments where similar predictions are made. We will only look at three or four of them. Turn with me first to Exodus 10:20-23 (Read). God has sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh has refused to let them go. So God has sent a series of plagues in

judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians. This Scripture describes the ninth of the ten plagues. Can you imagine going for three days with complete blackness? For them the sun actually did not appear! Because the sun is so constant and a source of life, many people have worshipped the sun. In the darkness their hearts were directed to One who is greater than the sun, indeed, the One who made it. A second Scripture in the Old Testament that has a similar prediction is Isaiah 13:9-13. If you peek up at verse 1, you'll see that this is a message against Babylon. (Read verses 9-13) God prophesied here through Isaiah that the stars, sun, and moon would all stop shining. It would be just a dark and black as it was in Egypt those three days. But notice also in verse 13 that God would shake the heavens, just as Jesus described in Mark 13:25.

A third parallel Scripture is Joel 2:1, 2 and 10. (Read) This passage is very similar to Mark 13 and seems to predict a time just before Christ returns. It is clearly a warning for everyone on earth.

There is a part of this 8<sup>th</sup> prediction that Jesus gives in Mark 13:25 that intrigues me. Jesus said that the "powers in the heavens will be shaken". Can you imagine what that would look like? In Revelation 6:12-17, another parallel Scripture, John pictures the sky being rolled up like a scroll. How amazing that will be. Why will they do this? As you read the passage, it seems that the heavens are making way for their coming King. The unbelievers cry out to be hidden "from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16).

Ellen White had the same privilege as John did in seeing the Second Coming of Christ in vision. Notice how she described the shaking of the heavens. This is from the book Early Writings page 41:

*December 16, 1848, the Lord gave me a view of the shaking of the powers of the heavens. I saw that when the Lord said "heaven," in giving the signs recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, He meant heaven, and when He said "earth" He meant earth. The powers of heaven are the sun, moon, and stars. They rule in the heavens. The powers of earth are those that rule on the earth. The powers of heaven will be shaken at the voice of God. **Then the sun, moon, and stars will be moved out of their places.** They will not pass away, but be shaken by the voice of God.*

*Dark, heavy clouds came up and clashed against each other. The atmosphere parted and rolled back; then we could look up through the open space in Orion, whence came the voice of God. The Holy City will come down through that open space. I saw that the powers of earth are now being shaken and that events come in order. War, and rumors of war, sword, famine, and pestilence are first to shake the powers of earth, then the voice of God will shake the sun, moon, and stars, and this earth also. I saw that the shaking of the powers in Europe is not, as some teach, the shaking of the powers of heaven, but it is the shaking of the angry nations.*

Now before we look at Jesus' final prediction in Mark 13, notice verse 26. The sun and moon have been darkened. The stars have fallen. They've all been shaken. But notice the Light that that cannot be dimmed or shaken. Those who are being judged, (the unbelievers) will see the Son of Man. How does He come? "With great power and glory". Jesus is the Light of the world. He is the light that will never go out. Remember the chorus of that beloved hymn? "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." Amen! Let's learn now to look to Jesus, so that when the powers of heaven are dimmed and shaken, we will remain lightened with His glory.

Let's now consider Jesus' last prediction: the deliverance of God's people in Mark 13:27 (Read). There are two main points I will call your attention to. First, in the last days God's people will be scattered. They will be found in the remotest parts of the globe. Some will be scattered in their death, as their enemies throw their ashes into the rivers. Others will be scattered by persecution and will hide in the mountains and caves. But notice this second point from Mark 13:27: Jesus and His angels will be able to find every single one of His people. Not a one will be missed. What an amazing rescue! Many of us were thrilled at the rescue of the 33 coal miners trapped 2300 feet underground in Chile. But it doesn't even begin to compare with what God will accomplish for His people at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus Christ.

I invite you to turn with me to Psalm 139:7-10. (Read) God's all-seeing eye. It's a curse for those trying to get away from Him. But it's a comfort and blessing to those who love Him. He always knows where you are. It

makes no difference if the sun's shining or not, because in verse 12 of Psalm 139, David declares that the darkness and light are the same to God.

And so we find out in our story today that just as these electrical lights are not always dependable, so the lights in the heavens will one day be darkened in judgment on all the unbelievers. Just as there is a world of light and darkness in the physical realm, so there is a world of spiritual light and darkness that is just as real. Satan and his angels are the powers of darkness, while Jesus is the light of the world. He alone is the light that will never go out. When the lights in the heavens go out, Jesus will be shining with power and great glory.

So where do you spend most of your time? In the darkness and shadows or in the Light? Whatever darkness you might experience in this world, you can choose to look up to the Light.

I would like to close with seven practical tips that will hopefully help you stay in the Light and to live in the light of the risen Lamb. First, memorize Bible verses that are filled with hope. Here are a few that have really kept me out of the shadows of depression, guilt and discouragement. 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness (And I love these last two words) at all." If I'm being harassed by guilt or sadness, it's not from God. He is the source of light and joy. Romans 5:1 says that when we have been justified by faith, "we have peace with God." God and I can live together peacefully because of Christ. Romans 5:20 says that God's grace is greater than all my sin. No matter how sinful I feel, God's grace has overcome it. Romans 8:1 says that in Christ "there is no condemnation". God does not abuse me for being a sinner. I can live free in His acceptance. These Scriptures give me hope and enable me to live in the Light of God's love and acceptance.

A second tip to living in the Light is to dream of things that only God can do. Instead of thinking about yours or other's faults and failures, walk through your day dreaming about what you want God to do in your life that is humanly impossible. As God brings them to your mind, write them down and pray over them every morning. I've done this and it has not only helped me connect with God, the source of light, but also to stay in His light during the day. My mind has something specific to focus on that is a God-given dream.

Number three, engage in useful labor. I used to spend a lot of my time waiting for God to do something to fix my problems. But I have seen God set me free from my darkness, when I have chosen to do something to help someone else and be productive. Idle time, spending hours every day in front of a TV, video games, or the newspaper will often lead you into a world of darkness.

Number four, sing or listen to spiritual songs. Even if you can't carry a tune, you can make a joyful noise. And there are so many other ways to surround yourself with an atmosphere of worship and praise to God. There are cassette tapes, CD's, i phones, mp3 players. If you have access to the internet, there's websites like Pandora and YouTube where you can watch and listen to music videos that praise the Lord. And, of course, there's the radio. You can ascend above the clouds into the Light of Jesus Christ on the wings of songs that praise and worship Him.

Number five, exercise. Sometimes all it takes to lift the shadows is to go for a walk outside in the fresh air.

Number six, determine not to use negative words. Say "yes" more often. Try to say "no" as little as possible. Do you know who is affected by your words the most? You are. Every negative word you say impacts your own thoughts, feelings and what you believe to be true.

Number seven, spend time with encouraging people. You are affected by those you spend time with. All of us can be negative at times. But there are some people who are a constant source of negative talk. They love to complain and gossip. Try to stay away from those kinds of people as much as possible. The darkness and shadows that they walk in will come over you as well.

My prayer for you is that you would learn to live in the Light of the risen Lamb. Jesus is the Light of the world. Follow Him and you will not walk in darkness, but you will have the light of life shining not only on you, but from within you (John 8:12).