

A Future without Fear

“Do not worry . . . for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:11)

Scripture: Mark 13:1–13

Song: “He Leadeth Me”

Years ago, my marriage ended suddenly. I was left alone with three small children and no job. As I contemplated an uncertain future, I felt overwhelmed by fear and helplessness. I think I understand a little of the apprehension the disciples may have felt as Jesus discussed their future.

Mark says that as Jesus was exiting the temple, one of His disciples spoke in awe about its massive stones. Jesus’ unexpected and disturbing response is that the day is coming when these huge stones would become rubble. Jesus paints a graphic and frightening picture of future events, including the disciples’ persecution.

Along with these fearful predictions, Jesus includes a promise to His disciples. In verse 11, Jesus says that when they stand trial, the Holy Spirit will put the words in their mouths, the very words they need. God will be as close as their next breath.

When I was caring for my children alone, I experienced something similar. When I faced difficult trials day after day, I felt God’s presence as near as breathing. The frightening future became an encouraging past.

Father, help me remember that my future is secure because You hold me incredibly close. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

October 6–12. **Valerie Bryant Bennett** lives in Tennessee. She is a retired teacher and tutor who loves her family, the outdoors, and her happy little mutt, Boomer.

Be Prepared

“People will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” (Mark 13:26)

Scripture: Mark 13:14–27

Song: “When the Trumpet of the Lord Shall Sound”

Across the street, workers are hammering and a cement truck is humming loudly. A new house is being built, and the neighborhood dogs are voicing their excitement. I need to make a casserole, print the church bulletins for Sunday, and prepare for tutoring sessions tomorrow. Daily life sometimes seems all-consuming. It is hard for me to retain perspective. I am a dot on a planet that is a dot in an unfathomable universe, and somehow the eternal God knows my name.

In today’s text, Jesus describes a time in the future when earthly events will dramatically intersect with an eternal plan. He pulls familiar images from the Old Testament to point His listeners toward future events that will indicate the culmination of history. At an unspecified time, inhabitants of earth will experience the “end of times,” and Christ will come again. Here, and in other places in Scripture, Christ urges us to be ready.

Over time, countless people have taught, written books, and passionately debated the details of Christ’s words in this passage, but the central message of Jesus is clear. Behind the noise and distractions of our days, there is an eternal reality unfolding. *Our Savior is coming back.* I want that reality to sink into my heart and infuse my busy earthly days with an eternal perspective.

Father, help me live so that if Jesus came today, I could greet Him with pure joy. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Don't Change a Thing

To obey is better than sacrifice. (1 Samuel 15:22b)

Scripture: 1 Samuel 15:20–26

Song: “Trust and Obey”

Speed limit 55. No right turn on red. Traffic laws limit our choices, and I confess, I don't always follow them perfectly. At times, I trust my own judgment rather than the rules. At other times, the rules hinder my goals. Disobedience to these laws can come with consequences. The consequences for disobeying God's Word are more serious.

In the verses that precede today's text, Samuel tells King Saul that God wants him to conquer the Amalekites and destroy every living thing. Saul decides to adapt God's command to fit what he deems more reasonable. He conquers then captures the Amalekite king and brings home the spoils of war. Saul had clearly heard God's commands, but he chose to adjust God's dictates. He was proud of his actions, and he set up a monument to boast about them. God sends Samuel to confront Saul. At first, Saul does not acknowledge his disobedience. Then he makes excuses. Samuel's words to Saul are firm and clear: worship is meaningless if God's commands are ignored.

If I am stopped by an officer for speeding, my sacrificial donation to the Police Benevolent Foundation will not make a difference. Christ paid for my sins, but I demonstrate my thanks by living in obedience to God's Word.

Father, as Your child, help me know Your will and to obey. In Jesus' name I pray.
Amen.

What's in a Name?

“I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13)

Scripture: John 14:12–17

Song: “There’s Just Something about That Name”

Anyone with a modern phone is probably familiar with AMBER alerts. The name choice of *Amber* comes from the tragic story of Amber Hagerman, a girl who was abducted 28 years ago. In her honor, a system was developed that has rescued almost 1,200 children. Alerts are issued in 50 states and 31 countries in Amber’s name.

God gave Jesus the name that is above all names—a name that will cause every knee to bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Philippians 2). This name has changed the course of history and individual lives for over two thousand years. In that name, broken things have been made whole, dark places have seen light, and despair has changed to hope. By that name, every person who desires forgiveness can receive it and be brought home again.

What a wonderful promise Jesus gives in today’s verse. Through His matchless name, He offers access to all His reserves. If I am lonely or frightened, confused or discouraged, hurt or hopeless, I can call out toward heaven in His name, and all of its storehouses gladly open.

Father, thank You that Your Son willingly gave His life to make us at peace with You. Fill me with Your Spirit of truth and make me more like Your Son. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Cleaning Day

[Jesus] made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts. (John 2:15a)

Scripture: John 2:12–22

Song: “Better Is One Day”

In today’s text, we see a side of Jesus that seems unfamiliar when compared with the gentle Jesus who blessed children, forgave sinners, and who wept with Mary and Martha. The Jesus who burst onto the scene at the temple “market,” cracking a whip to move animals and turning over tables is a Jesus filled with “holy anger.”

Ungodly activities were taking place in His Father’s house. Greedy men were dishonoring the temple by using it as a venue for selling (at a premium) sacrificial animals necessary for Passover. This temple had become a noisy, dirty place filled with the sounds of animals and clinking coins. Jesus reclaimed it for God and those who worship Him.

I never thought this story was particularly relevant to my life until I read 1 Corinthians 3:16: “You yourselves are God’s temple and . . . God’s Spirit dwells in your midst.” If God considers *me* to be a temple where the Holy Spirit dwells, suddenly I see Jesus’ purge of the temple in a new light. Sometimes I allow thoughts, actions, and media choices in my life that don’t belong in a temple of God. That clutter may need to be examined if God is going to be comfortable there and people are going to be drawn to Him. Maybe I need a cleaning day.

Father, I want my life to glorify You. Help me clean out anything that dishonors You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The Humbling of a King

“My sacrifice . . . is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

Scripture: Psalm 51:15–19

Song: “Create in Me a Clean Heart”

I aspire to be one of those people who consistently demonstrates a sweet spirit and a warm heart. To be frank, I struggle. I want to follow Jesus, but sometimes I am stubborn, critical, or impatient. Sin is a slippery slope, and I have found myself at the bottom of that slope more than once. I have often made today's psalm my own prayer.

David wrote Psalm 51 when God exposed his moral failures. David committed adultery and then murder. His position as king of Israel made it possible to reach for whatever he wanted; his power made it possible to remove anyone who stood in his way. He could hide his deeds from the people but not from God. Confronted with his sin, David was without excuse. He knew that God wasn't interested in a ritual sacrifice for his sin. God desired to see remorse within David's heart. So King David offered God the only thing he had: a repentant and broken heart. This, he knew, was what God desired.

When the Holy Spirit convicts my heart of sin, like David, I know that God doesn't want me to perform some outward service to compensate. God wants me to offer Him my repentant heart. I am forgiven because Christ died for me, but I am changed because God can lovingly remake my heart.

Father, thank You for Jesus' sacrifice for me. Create in me a clean heart. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Worship: Trifling or True?

“Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you.” (Jeremiah 7:23b)

Scripture: Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23

Song: “I Was Glad When They Said unto Me”

Billy Sunday was one of America’s best-known evangelists. One of his humorous statements was, “Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you a car.” That observation fits today’s Scripture well.

God sent Jeremiah to stand and speak at the gate of the temple. God had severe reprimands for those coming to worship. This beautiful temple gave a false sense of security. On the one hand, it was evidence of God’s presence in their midst. But Jeremiah proclaimed to the people that their security rested not on the temple but on their obedience to Him. God pointed out that they stole, committed adultery, murdered, and worshiped other gods. Then, according to the image Jeremiah paints in this text, they confidently stood before God and bragged that they were secure in His hands (vv. 9–10). God said that if they did not amend their ways, He would remove them.

Like the prophet Jeremiah, Jesus cleared the temple of those who abused His Father’s house. The presence of God is no place for hypocrisy and underhanded dealings. But for those who place their faith in Christ, it is wonderful to dwell in the courts of God. The psalmist writes, “No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (Psalm 84:11).

Father, please help me come to worship “in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.