

Luke 21:5-28, 33

If you had the opportunity to place a bet on the World Series, how much money would you bet? Now don't tell me, "But pastor, I don't gamble." This is no gamble. The World Series already took place. The Giants won. Unless you bet on the Texas Rangers, you're guaranteed to win. If you could do this, how much would you bet? Not one or two dollars; you'd drain your savings account. You'd take out a loan for as much as you could borrow. It's a sure thing! You know the outcome already. You can't lose. But of course it doesn't work that way. There has to be risk involved...a lot of it, or the gambling halls would go bankrupt in a hurry.

No one is accurately able to predict the future...except for one thing. We Christians do not know when heaven and earth will pass away, but we do know that it will. And we also know, on the flipside, that the Word of God will endure forever. It's black-and-white for us, a certainty, written in stone. "Heaven and earth will pass away," Jesus says, "but My words will not pass away." So which one are you going to bet on...and how much will you bet? There are two horses in the race--"Heaven and Earth" and "God's Word." Upon which of the two will you invest everything?

If you take a look around, you will see that most people are betting on Heaven and Earth. It's easy to see this because their way of life gives them away. Take the average American citizen. How many of his or her waking hours are spent in pursuit of the American dream, and how many are spent in the Word of God? Making money far outranks time spent in prayer and the Scriptures. Does the average American place a higher priority on the Word of God or on sports, either playing or watching? You know the answer. Stadiums are filled on Sunday afternoons, but church pews sit empty on Sunday mornings. Thanksgiving plans are being made, but very few Americans will set aside time for the hearing of God's Word. Down the line, people by far are betting on Heaven and Earth, not the Word of God.

But you're different, aren't you? You are betting everything you've got on God's Word. When the church bells call you to worship, you don't ignore them for something else in the world to do, you come to listen and receive. When you gather for a church meeting, you expect to be fed with God's Word before the business of the meeting gets underway. When the church newsletter arrives, you don't chuck it in the trash, you open it to read news items and also to be fed the Word. And isn't it true that in your home your Bible is open often so that God's words live upon your heart? You're not betting on Heaven and Earth because you already know the outcome of the race. Jesus says that His words will endure forever, but that heaven and earth will pass away. And for you that's a sure thing. You know the outcome already now because Jesus tells you. Bet on it. Not a few measly dollars...everything you've got--your eternal soul!

People should know better than to bet on Heaven and Earth. The signs are all around us that in the end it's not going to win the race. False prophets, false preachers, wars and tumults, nations rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. Their horse is already now showing signs of weakness. Heaven and Earth is starting to limp down the final stretch. It's showing signs that it will fade away.

And yet people are refusing to give up on it. They're closing their eyes to all the warning signs Jesus gives. They're cheering it on..."C'mon Heaven and Earth! You can do it!" They refuse to switch horses in the middle of the race. God's Word calls people everywhere to repent. The church bells are calling young and old to stop betting on Heaven and Earth to win, and to place all their trust in the words of Jesus. But people still cling to their horse in the race. No repentance. No stopping to listen

to the enduring Word of God. No place for Jesus in their life. It's Heaven and Earth all the way for them.

It was that way in Jesus' time too. Jerusalem was their horse in the race. Jerusalem is sure to win! Just look at how marvelous she is! Her massive walls, her noble stones, her impressive temple! Jesus warned them that their horse would not win. "Not one stone will be left upon another," He said. Jerusalem will not finish the race; she will be destroyed. But the people paid no attention. Jesus does not know what He's talking about! His words will not come true! But in the year 70 the words of God finished the race as the winner. Jerusalem, the entire city with her temple, was leveled to the ground. And all who had bet their lives and hopes on her perished.

It will be just like that in the end. Heaven and earth will pass away, and all who bet their lives and hopes on the things of this world will perish forever. It will be like Zenyatta. Have you heard about this race horse? Nineteen races in three years...Zenyatta won every one of those nineteen races. She never even came in second, once! But earlier this month, her twentieth and final race before she retired, Zenyatta came in second. She did not win. For the first time she lost. People were shocked. The horse's owners were stunned. The horse's jockey began to cry. Her perfect record was ruined! And all the people who had bet on Zenyatta to win, that day tore up their tickets in despair.

Let us not be lulled into going along with the mindset of the world. We live here on this earth, but let us not become too attached to it. Be careful or this world and all it has to offer will draw you, your time, your love, your trust away from the abiding words of Jesus. Enjoy hunting, but do not allow it to keep you from hearing the Word of God. Commit yourself to your job, but do not place your work above the Word. Love your family, but do not allow your love for others to take priority over your love for the Lord. No matter how well this world is going along, like Zenyatta, it will lose its final race. God's Word will come out the winner.

And so bet on God's Word. Invest in His promises to you. Trust completely in what Jesus has to say. You can't go wrong because the outcome you already know. In the end you, dear Christian, will be with Jesus in heaven. God's Word guarantees it. There is no doubt about it. Jesus died for you. God has forgiven all your sins. Jesus defeated death and hell for you. You are baptized into His death. He rose again to give you the unending life. Because you trust in Jesus the outcome is certain. Does it matter that you have been unfaithful to Him? Does it matter that you have not lived a life free of sin? Does it matter that your love for God falls short each day? No! God forgives you. And His word is certain. It cannot lose. What God says is so even if all the world refuses to believe it. "Lord, I believe you," we cry, "help my unbelief." Have you always bet on what God says? No you have not, nor have I. Sometimes we live and act as though Heaven and Earth will pull it out in the end. Sometimes we love this world too much. God does not hold this against you. This is why Jesus died for you. You are forgiven. You are God's child in Christ.

You have a horse in the race--the Word of God. Everything depends upon that Word coming out the winner. Your life, your hope, your eternal salvation depends on it. Have no fear. No matter where that Word of God is at in the race, in the end it will be victorious. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words," says Jesus, "will not pass away." Jesus says it. Believe it. The outcome is certain. Jesus' words will win, and so you, friend, in the end will win with Him. Amen.