

There's no stopping it now.

The first one was knocked over on the kitchen table, tumbling into the next until the last domino fell off the edge... and it landed right on target on the floor, setting off the next chain of tiles. The clicking and clacking filling the room as all eyes follow the falling pieces, swirling, splitting, reconverging, getting to the top of the basement stairs. Here's the moment of truth. Here's where the plan has been spoiled every other time. The last one tumbles over the top step. It snags the next in line but doesn't hit it solid so everyone waits with baited breath to see if it will tumble down or if it's time to reset, and this time it's a go. The chain weaves it's way back and forth, crashing down the steps, around the corner until at last it meets the end, a huge divide, creating an interwoven pattern of tiles that will inevitably fall into an intricate flower. Facebook is going to eat this up.

And it all started with one little push.

Today's Old Testament and Gospel lessons read like such a line of dominos. Malachi and Jesus present us with event that follows event, leading us to expect one thing after the other, our eyes open to simply watch it all happen.

It begins as Jesus hears some innocuous comments about the beauty of the temple, of the grandiosity of the stones and the decorations. One might expect such a wonder to pass the test of time, to persist generation after generation, but no, the days are coming when this place of beauty, this place of God, will be torn down.

And alongside this cheery prophecy, Jesus lumps in deception by false messiahs, persecution from religious leaders and political powers, the obliteration of the whole of God's city, Jerusalem, and even calamities in the skies, all to precede the coming of heaven's judge.

And now, the disciples, they didn't get to stand back in the kitchen and watch as this chain of events took place. They, in fact, fell right in the middle of it all. They would be among the ones fleeing Jerusalem, unable to find refuge in the strong walls any longer; they would be the ones betrayed by family members and sent before tribunals, losing their own lives for the name and sake of Christ. They would be the ones needing to resist such false claims from this messiah and that.

So you, my fellow believers, can breathe easy, because most of this has already taken place. Many of these dominos are laying flat and the dust has settled. You don't need to await the temple's stones falling all around. You can go visit and see the pitiful remnants, a mere hint at the glory of what once stood. You can go visit the city and wonder how God could let such devastation happen to the place that was His own.

You can go and see what has happened. You can know that God's Word has been proven trustworthy. Just as God took His blessing and presence away from those stones and those altars because of the Jews' unfaithfulness to Him, and because His presence was now the person and work of Jesus Christ, so He would be faithful in His other sure words.

His disciples, they have already gone before the leaders and faithfully proclaimed their faith. They were bold in their profession, converting some, offending others, and all but one were killed for their faith (and even John's exile was no vacation in paradise.).

So breathe deep and easy, because much of this you don't need to fear; much of it is simply a history lesson for you in God's honest work.

But the heavens have not been shaken, the earth not distressed, not nearly enough, at least, for the Son of Man to return yet. This is still on its way, that great and awful day when people will know the meaning of fear as the powers in the heavens quake. It may seem like we've been waiting a long time, like the last dominos are wobbling and we're not sure if they'll ever tumble down.

But you can be certain that this end will happen just as surely as every other moment along the road. It's on its way, and it will be more than you can even imagine, but that need not inspire any fear or anxiety in you. You can indeed hear and heed Christ invitation to straighten your head and look with hope to the horizon, because your redemption is drawing near.

So near, in fact, that it's already present and accomplished.

For just as Jesus was speaking prophecies that would, for the most part, be completed within the lifetime of the disciples, Malachi was prophesying that which would be completed in Jesus' lifetime.

What the prophet sees and proclaims may have the same feel as what Jesus says, with imagery of approaching destruction on the godless and unrighteous, but all of this is completed in the time of our Lord. Elijah precedes this day of the Lord, just as John the Baptist pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world. And within days of Jesus talking of the temple, He accomplishes just that. He is, on the cross, the lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. He endures the day of the Lord in which all sin is consumed and only righteousness remains.

Rather than dishing that day out onto everyone who deserves it, God repays the liar and the cheat, the lazy and blasphemous, He repays all our sins on Christ, leaving no more remnant of our unrighteousness than there are leaves and branches in a field after a wildfire blazes through. It's decimated, obliterated, stolen from you and dealt with so it cannot harm you anymore.

God is good to His Word. Just as He promised Christ and His salvation and was faithful to send Him, just as He foreknew the destruction of the temple and that came to pass, so He knows and will bring about the end, when sin is no more and only paradise is known.

It will be chaotic and scary as the earth quakes, as wars rage, and as even the heavens fall. But He has been faithful to care for you as conflicts threaten you, as temptation and sin want to drag you back into the pits of your damnation, as death wants to steal from you your hope. The God who carried the disciples through the fall of Jerusalem and all their persecution will do the same for you when others question your faith, when you yourself doubt it all, and

when the evil one won't seem to leave you alone. God will be faithful to give you words to confess your faith just as He did to the disciples, when you need to confess the hope you have. He will be faithful to preserve every hair on your head, even if the decaying world steals away your breath before He returns.

And He will return. There's nothing that can stop Him now. There will still be pain and sorrow, suffering and pandemonium until then, but rather than cringing and cowering at the chaos of the world, see it as a reminder that the end is near. Your redemption is closer day by day. In fact your Lord has already brought salvation and righteousness to you. So simply wait until that end when He at last returns.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Amen.