

Mark 13:1-13 Watch Out: Do Not Be Led Astray Falls Ch. PM 10/22/2023

Many Christians in modern America are attracted with admiration to preachers who stand up and speak about what they call “The Signs of the Times.” An excited evangelist will talk about an earthquake, or the resulting famine, or a recent military skirmish, and he will say that “on the basis of prophecy” it is “a sure sign” of Christ’s return any day now. He will sound very confident!

Watch Out: do not be led astray into speculating when the world will end, but rather trust Jesus, enjoy His good news, testify, and endure to the end.

1. Watch out: do not be led astray! (by buildings, persons, events) The end is not yet! (v.1-8)

Verse 1 – One of the great architectural wonders of the world was this magnificent temple. It took 46 years to build. Have you ever looked at a glass building when the sun is reflecting off of it? It is bright! That temple was built with large white stones about the size of railroad cards, and lavishly decorated with gold. Glorious! When sunlight reflected off of it, the building was so bright, it was nearly blinding. The Jewish people believed it to be the very sanctuary of God and therefore indestructible. We can understand the shock to the disciples to hear Jesus saying it will all be torn down!

Verse 2, their superficial admiration of the temple buildings contrasts with Jesus’ declaration of the ultimate bankruptcy of these buildings. Jesus gave His disciples the new viewpoint of the kingdom of God. The disciples were committed, but they remain slow to absorb the implications. Mark our author expects us to embrace the viewpoint of Jesus – that the temple is being replaced by Jesus. No more priests, sacrifices. Worship will now be centered in Jesus. *Something greater than the temple is here!* (Mt. 12:6) The stone temple was about to lose its central role in God’s kingdom, and the kingdom will centralize around a new focal point.

Verse 3 – the established pattern in the Gospel of Mark is public statements by Jesus, followed by private questions by disciples. Notice the setting for these private questions was the Mount of Olives. So, between verse 2 and verse 3, Jesus and the disciples had walked up the hill across from the temple, and they went up to about 200 feet. As they turned around to sit and to look, now they really had quite a view of the temple! The disciples were still thinking about the statement of Jesus. So, in verse 4 – they asked. Destroy the temple? When? By what sign?

These were natural questions of curiosity, but Jesus replied by expressing concerns for their spiritual lives. They had asked for when the temple would be destroyed, but Jesus told them not to be led astray. Then Jesus launched a talk for 4 verses about times when the destruction of the temple was not going to take place.

Verses 5-6, Not while you are being tempted to be led astray. Not while many are coming in the name of Jesus (claiming to be the Messiah, and leading many astray.)

Verse 7 – Not while the disciples were hearing reports of wars and rumors of more wars.

Verse 8 – Not when nation rises against nation. Not when kingdom rises against kingdom. Not when there will be earthquakes in various places. Not when there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains – not yet the birth. Not yet the end of the temple.

Jesus is teaching what we need to hear - not everything that seems to be a sign of a future event is actually such a sign!

Yes, Jesus just said that there is a destruction of the temple to anticipate, but these wars, earthquakes, and famines only show in general that it is approaching, and they do not show specifics and details of when it will arrive.

The destruction of the temple will bring with it a birth. A new beginning, which is something like a birth. The end of the physical temple will introduce a new temple, which is Jesus Himself, and His Church on earth.

Jesus wanted to clear away their natural tendency to look for signs of the itinerary of the temple's destruction. In those next years in the areas of political movements and natural disasters, there was a lot of activity that could threaten to distract disciples! The disciples must not allow themselves to be misled. They would have enough to do to maintain their witness during upcoming difficult days. They must not be sidelined by a fascination with when precisely the temple will come down.

All the commands are what NOT to do. In verse 5, do not be led astray, in verse 7, do not to be alarmed, in verse 9, do not stop guarding yourselves, in verse 11, do not be anxious what to say during times of unexpected public testimony. What the disciples needed was not what they requested - an intellectual timetable of what to expect, but rather what the disciples needed was cautions to vigilant in keeping their hearts. They didn't need more signs and more dates; instead, they need spiritual discernment to not follow the wrong person! The wrong persons were the many in verse 6 claiming to be the Messiah, and the ones in verse 22 described as false christs working hard to lead people astray.

2. Watch yourselves! (spread gospel, testify, trust). (v.9-11)

Verse 9 –the disciples of Jesus could expect to be singled out for hatred and bad treatment by secular governments, just as Jesus Himself. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has a pattern of warning His disciples. Mark 4:17, “...*when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word...*” Mark 6:11, “*if any place will not receive you, shake off the dust ...on your feet.*” Mark 8:15, “*beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.*” Mark 8:34-38, “*If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me....whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it...whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him*

the Son of Man will also be ashamed...” Mark 10:30, this age includes “...persecutions...” But here in Mark 12, there is escalating tension. Here in verse 9, Jesus warned, “*Be on your guard.*” It is helpful to know that the word here is the same word as in verse 5, “*To see*” or to Watch. For what are they to be watching? Themselves! Be on your guard is a good translation. The warning is not for the purpose that they would avoid or escape the persecution, but rather the warning is so that they prepare themselves to endure the persecution faithfully. Verse 9 continues “...*they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them...*” Jesus has slowed down the answering of the curious questions of the disciples, because as a Good Shepherd, Jesus knew that they needed to be spiritually prepared that the time of waiting may be longer than they expected. The waiting may be a time that will put their faithfulness to a severe test.

But in verse 10, for Jesus to specifically mention that “...*the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations*” shows that their two questions of ‘when-and-by-what-signs’ for the end of the temple have not been forgotten by our Master Teacher Jesus. Here in verse 10, Jesus was providing an element of what must happen before the end of the temple arrives – namely, persecution and the launch of worldwide missions. Both of those things happened, as we know from the Book of Acts! The temple will not be destroyed until the good news has already gone out beyond Israel to the nations.

Significantly, the new temple of Jesus and His church - which replaces the physical temple building - will not be a solely Jewish organization. The spiritual church Jesus is building, will be a house for people from all the nations. The good news for Jews became also good news for Gentiles. The Messiah of the Jews also rescued all. This was fulfilled because there was already in existence an international people of God, before the stone temple was dismantled.

3. Endure to the end! (family may oppose you, people may hate you for Jesus’ sake). (v.12-13)

There is a set of three of the same verb “*delivered over.*” In verse 9, the disciples will be delivered over to councils and beaten. Verse 11, the disciples will be delivered over to speak during various trials of councils and kings. In verse 12, family members will be delivered over by their own family members, or a father giving over his child, or a child giving over their parents to have them put to death.

The time for the disciples between when Jesus made this statement about the temple, and 40 years later when the temple was actually destroyed, was not a time of passive waiting. Rather, it was a time of a) actively proclaiming the good news, b) enduring the experience of persecution, and c) faithful enduring. In verse 13, Jesus promised that the one who endures to the end will be saved! The disciples were learning that they could be saved quite apart from the animal sacrifices in the

temple, redeemed quite apart from those wonderful stones, the wonderful buildings, and the great buildings in which the Savior had been teaching until that moment. Verse 1 was profound when it said that the Savior “*came out of the temple.*” As a result, the salvation of God was no longer to be found in that stone temple, but rather salvation was to be found in Jesus.

At the time when Jesus spoke the words of our passage, the Roman Empire had just enjoyed a long time of peace. But about 40 years later, turmoil upset the whole Roman empire, and in the span of only one year, Rome went through 4 different emperors. Mistaken sign after mistaken sign was produced. Those who loved to fix dates, certainly fixed dates. But the disciples were cautioned beforehand not to involve themselves in the uproar of guessing. The cautions of Jesus are not just for ancient times and not just for the original disciples. In these last 300 years, Europe has had 300 wars. When one war is singled out as proof, then here come the date fixers and the mistaken signs upset a new group of people in a new generation.

In the years AD 60-80, the Roman Empire was thoroughly and repeatedly ravaged with many natural disasters: earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, pestilence and consequent famines. Not any single one of these many terrible events could give anyone the proper ground to make an accurate prediction about the undoing of the temple or about the return of Christ. Throughout the centuries consistently, there have been many violent earthquakes. Even ancient historians and philosophers such as Aristotle and Pliny describe seismic phenomena in their days. And the modern world is no exception. One author counted 700 natural disturbances, just during the 100 year span beginning in the year 1800, and ending with the year 1900! And since the food chain is fragile, famines have occurred constantly, and were repeatedly interrupted by all of the things we are listing.

Here is the key to understand: the disciples made a mistake by lumping together the destruction of the stone temple with the end of the world, as if they were one event happening on the same day. This confusion of the disciples is made clear over in Matthew 24:3, when the disciples asked, ‘...*what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*’ But Jesus consistently distinguished the two events – 1) the destruction of the stone temple and 2) the end of the world. That is the key for our understanding. The destruction of the stone temple can happen at a different time from the end of the world.

In our study of Mark chapter 13, then, we must be clear about which one Jesus is discussing! Jesus knew that many of His followers could fall victim to teachers who would say that the end of the world is just months away! Jesus said no, that instead these events are simply confirmation of birth pains. Labor pains tell us that a baby is coming. But no one knows how long the labor will last! God may cause certain events to be extended for a very long time, longer than our lifetimes

on earth. Or, things may accelerate very rapidly. We don't know which one! Same is true for future events - Jesus could come tonight or in the next century. 2 Peter 3:8, "...do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." What is the lesson? Be ready. We never allow ourselves to be drawn into a panic by a wrong diagnosis of the birth pains, or of a couple of thousand years of spiritual birth pangs or contractions of the universe. We stay ready by repentance and faith.

Conclusion:

1) We may have to endure suffering. We are never promised that we will be conveniently swept up and away to heaven without suffering! Quite the opposite. Our Savior prepares us for suffering. Trouble from the world, from the public, from the government. Trouble from natural events – earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and famines. Trouble from our own flesh and blood. Part of counting the cost of being a Christian is to take to heart the teaching of Jesus about the suffering that we may be called to endure. Our walk with Jesus Christ may bring to us some bitter words, difficult events, and painful seasons of life. If it does not happen for you, then you can be especially thankful. Be ready. Because we live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to the Biblical viewpoint, remain ready to put up with an increase of ridicule, mockery, slander, and other forms of mistreatments. Never be surprised to receive suffering for the sake of Christ.

2) We are called to be witnesses to Christ, anywhere that God places us. A Christian may be unexpectedly called to speak before his whole company or before the nation's government leaders. A Christian may be called to testify before a national gathering of a Christian denomination or conference. A Christian may be called to testify before his or her gathered family at a special occasion. A Christian may be unexpectedly called to testify to just one co-worker in the break room at work or the parking lot on the way to your cars. In an internet age, what a Christian says in one place, could unexpectedly be caught on video, and it could become popular, being seen by millions. God equips us with His Spirit to have words full of wisdom, truth, grace and mercy. At this time of year, we tell again the stories of the Reformers, and the courage that they showed. Christ is faithful to His Word and He is faithful to us as His witnesses, wherever he places us.

3) Do not be led astray into a focus on events happening in modern Israel; focus on Christ and His church. The function of prophecy in Scripture is to challenge us to repent and believe in God, and serve Him and His church. The function of prophecy in the Bible is not to get us curiously asking 'when and by what signs'! In our passage in verse 3, we are told that Peter was one who was there and heard when Jesus said these things. Peter heard the teaching of Jesus and took it to heart.

Listen to what Peter wrote to us later, in 1 Peter 2:5-10, “...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ and ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Be focused not on modern Israel, but on Christ and His church.

4) Always remember and always rejoice in the victory of Christ. Verse 13, “...the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Victory for you. Salvation for you. But also victory for spreading the Word of God. The spread of His Word of truth and grace cannot be stopped. 2 Timothy 2:8-10, from prison Paul wrote to his student Timothy, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”