

Mark 13:1-13 Watch Out: Do Not Be Led Astray Falls Ch. PM 5/12/2024

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 a recent earthquake, and the resulting famine, or a recent military skirmish, probably in the Middle East, and he will dogmatically conclude 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, or events) The end is not yet! (v.1-8)**

Verse 1 – One of the great architectural wonders of the world was this magnificent temple in which Jesus had been teaching, but now had just come out in verse 1. This temple was really something. It had taken 46 years to build. That temple was built with large white stones about the size of railroad cars, and that temple was lavishly decorated with gold. It was a spectacular sight to see! When sunlight reflected off of that temple, the building became so bright, it was nearly blinding. Have you ever looked at a glass building when the sun is reflecting off of it? It is bright! In addition, the Jewish people had been taught that the temple was the very sanctuary of God and they concluded that therefore the temple was indestructible. With all of that context, we can understand the statement of the disciples in verse 1. We can also understand the resulting shock to the disciples to hear Jesus reply by saying that the entire temple would all be torn down, and to be leveled so thoroughly that not one stone would be left upon another stone!

Verse 2, their superficial admiration of the temple buildings holds a very sharp contrast with the declaration of their teacher Jesus, a statement in which Jesus implied the ultimate bankruptcy of these buildings. Jesus gave His disciples a new viewpoint of the kingdom of God. The disciples were committed to Jesus and His teachings, but the disciples remained slow to absorb the implications of the teachings of Jesus. Mark our author expected us as readers to embrace the viewpoint of Jesus – that the stone temple was soon to be replaced by Jesus Himself. Soon there would be no more priests, no more sacrifices, and even no more temple building! Soon the worship of God would be centered in Jesus, somehow. There would be a new sacrifice, offered by a new priest, resulting in a new temple. Indeed, with the arrival of Jesus, it was said by Jesus Himself that *Something greater than the temple is here!* (Mt. 12:6) The stone temple was about to lose its central role in God’s kingdom. The kingdom would re-centralize from the stone temple, to a new focal point, a replacement temple, not made of stone.

Verse 3 – the established pattern within the Gospel of Mark for quite a few chapters now, has been public statements made by Jesus, followed by private

questions by disciples posed to Jesus their Rabbi. Notice that we are told in verse 3 that the setting for the private questions this time was the Mount of Olives. So, between verse 2 and verse 3, it is expected that we understand from Mark's note as narrator, and from the geography of the hill that still exists today, that Jesus and His disciples had walked up the hill across from the temple. They would have had to have gone up to about 200 feet sea level. That is about the height of a 20 story building, a building with 20 floors. As they turned around to sit and to look, now from that spot they really had quite a view of the temple! It is natural that the disciples would have been still thinking about the incredible statement of their teacher Jesus about the temple. So, in verse 4 – the disciples put their thoughts into words, and they asked Jesus privately about it. Destroy the temple? When? By what sign?

These were natural questions of curiosity, but Jesus replied not by answering their factual questions, but instead Jesus replied by expressing concern 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, verses 5,6,7, and 8, about times when the destruction of the temple was not going to take place.

Verse 5, Not while they were encountering people who are trying to lead them astray. That is not yet the end of the temple.

Verse 6, Not while many were coming in the name of Jesus (people would show up in the name of Jesus, claiming to speak for Jesus, and even worse, actually claiming to BE the Messiah, and as a result, those people could be found leading many astray.) That is not yet the end of the temple.

Verse 7 – Not while the disciples were hearing reports of wars and rumors of more wars. That is not yet the end of the temple.

Verse 8 – Not when a nation would rise against a nation. Not when a kingdom would rise against a kingdom. Not when there would be earthquakes in various places of the world. Not when there would be famines. These would be but the beginning of the birth pains – not yet the birth. Not yet the end of the temple.

Jesus is teaching what they needed to hear - not everything that seemed to be a sign of a future event was actually such a sign!

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

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

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

All the commands in this statement of Jesus were 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 from Jesus was not what they requested from Jesus. The disciples had requested from Jesus an intellectual timetable of what to expect, but rather what the disciples needed was cautions to be vigilant in the keeping of their hearts. The disciples did not need more signs and more dates; instead, the disciples needed enough spiritual discernment to not follow any of the wrong persons! The wrong persons were many persons in verse 6 who would teach falsely, but to teach in the name of Jesus, and the many who even would go so far as to claim to be the Messiah. Later Mark wrote in verse 22, the wrong persons were the ones described as false prophets and even false Christs, those who were working hard to lead people astray from Jesus. Jesus their true Shepherd cautioned them to watch out, and Mark here wrote it all down, so that they would be able to keep focused on the trusted warning from their True Shepherd.

## **2. Watch yourselves! (spread the gospel, testify, and 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 had been singled out. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, Jesus had 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 13, there is escalating tension of danger and therefore warnings from Jesus about the danger. 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 of Jesus here is

not for the purpose that they would avoid or escape the persecution itself, which does not seem to be considered as an option at all, but rather the focus of the warning of Jesus here was so that they would properly 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 their Good Shepherd, Jesus knew that they needed to be spiritually prepared that the time of their waiting may be longer than they expected. The waiting may be a time of sufficient duration that the waiting 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 the initial two questions from the disciples 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 began providing an element of what must happen before the end of the temple would arrive – namely, persecution of believers and the launch of worldwide missions. As we know from the Book of Acts in God’s word, both of those things happened soon after Jesus ascended back to heaven! The temple would not be destroyed until the good news has already gone out beyond Israel to the nations.

Significantly, the new temple of Jesus Himself and His church as the worshipping community in which God dwells - which replaces the physical temple building - will not be a solely Jewish organization. The spiritual church that Jesus would begin building, would be a house for people not just from the nation of Israel, but the church would also include people from all of the nations. The good news for Jews became also good news for Gentiles. The Messiah of the Jews also rescued people from all of the nations. The Book of Acts shows how this was fulfilled, namely, that there was already in existence an international people of God, before the stone temple was dismantled in the year A.D. 70.

### **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.*” #1, in verse 9, the disciples will be delivered over to councils and beaten. #2, in verse 11, the disciples will be delivered over to speak during various trials of councils and kings. #3, in verse 12, family members will be delivered over by their own family members, such as a brother delivering over his brother, or a father delivering over his child, or a child delivering over their parents, to have them put to death.

This upcoming zone of time for the disciples, the time between when Jesus made this statement about the temple, and about 40 years later when the temple was actually destroyed, was not a time of the disciples passively waiting without activity. 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 previous animal sacrifices in the temple, that they could be redeemed quite apart from those wonderful stones, those wonderful buildings, and those great buildings in which the Savior had been teaching until that moment. It turns out that Mark had another meaning in verse 1 when Mark wrote that the Savior “*came out of the temple.*” As of the arrival of Jesus, the salvation of God was no longer to be found in that stone temple, but rather salvation of God was to be found in Jesus the Savior, Jesus the Temple.

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

Going back to the disciples, we know that 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 since then, there have been many violent earthquakes. Even ancient historians and philosophers such as Aristotle and Pliny describe seismic phenomena in their own lifetimes. 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 occurred constantly, and were repeatedly interrupted by all of the same sorts of things that we are listing happened around the time of the destruction of the stone temple.

Here is a key lesson: 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 was confirmed over in Matthew 24:3, when the disciples asked, “*...what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” In answer, Jesus consistently distinguished those two events: 1) the destruction of the stone temple and 2) the end of the world. That is a key lesson for our understanding of Mark chapter 13. The destruction of the stone temple can happen at a different time from the end of the world.

In our upcoming study of the rest of Mark chapter 13, then, we must always remain clear about which one of those two events Jesus is discussing! Jesus knew that many of His followers could fall victim to teachers who would say that the end of the world was just months away! Jesus said no, that instead these events would be simply confirmation of birth pains. Labor pains tell us that a baby will be coming soon. 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, other things may accelerate very rapidly. We don't know whether the events will be long or short! Same is true for future events - Jesus could come tonight or ten centuries from now! 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 take-home lesson? Be ready. We must never allow ourselves to be drawn into a panic by a wrong diagnosis of the birth pains, or by a couple of thousand years of spiritual birth pangs or contractions of the universe. We stay ready by means of 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 garage 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. Every 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.*”