

## THE GOSPEL MUST FIRST BE PREACHED

Mark 13:1-25

Key Verse: 13:10

*“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”*

When we see TV news programs and websites filled with bad news and violent pictures, we wonder what the world is becoming. In this confusing world, one can easily get lost. Many young people simply follow the trend of our society because they don't know what to do. Who can help them to find a direction in life? God can help them!

In Mark 13, Jesus tells us about the end times, and how we should live a life of faith while we are waiting for his return. When ominous things happen around us, we easily become fearful and anxious. But if we have a clear sense of what God is doing, we don't have to live in anxiety. Instead, we can fulfill God's purpose for our lives with confidence. The words of Christ we study this morning are not new to most of us. But I pray that these words really come to our hearts so that we may live a victorious life in this confusing world.

### I. “NOT ONE STONE WILL BE LEFT” (1-2)

Look at verse 1. *“As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’”* Jesus and his disciples just came out of the temple and were going to the Mount of Olives, which was situated in full view of the temple. One disciple exclaimed, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” The disciples were from Galilee. Their visit to Jerusalem was like us going to New York City. When they saw the massive stone buildings of the temple, they were impressed. They acted like a country boy walking along the streets of Manhattan, looking up the skyscrapers. The temple at that time was the one Herod the Great had been renovating for more than 45 years. The massive project was completed in A.D. 64, just in time to be destroyed again by the invading Roman army.

We are told that the buildings were indeed spectacular. Massive white marble stones were used, some of them over sixty feet long. The eastern front of the building complex was covered with plates of gold so that it reflected the rays of the rising sun. The temple was a culmination of art and architectural triumph of Herod.

The buildings certainly impressed the disciples. Perhaps they were even more impressed by the Jewish leaders who were strolling the temple courts, wearing elegant robes. They envied the religious leaders for all their privileges, luxury and high social status. Maybe they couldn't hide their feelings of inferiority. They couldn't wait for the earthly messianic kingdom they thought Jesus was going to establish. They were blinded by the glittering things of the world that they could not have a clear spiritual sense. They were supposed to be the future movers and shakers of history in God, but their spiritual

vision at that time was clouded by their human desires.

Look at verse 2. *“Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”* Jesus’ view of the temple was quite different from that of the disciples. Jesus saw beyond the white marbles and glittering plates of gold. He saw the magnificent temple with the eyes of God, not with the eyes of envy. He predicted the imminent doom of Herod’s temple in A.D. 70 when it fell to the besieging army of Titus. The Roman army desecrated the temple and demolished it completely until not one stone was left on another, in order to take out the gold plates in between the stones.

Jesus’ prophecy, however, was more than about the temple. He also taught them about the destiny of this world. All things of this world are temporal. Nothing of this world is permanent. When we look at the recent stride in scientific and technological fields, we cannot but marvel at the scope and speed of human achievements. Advances in science and technology have made our lives more comfortable than ever before. With a click of mouse, we get to know what a friend in California or in Korea had for breakfast this morning. Facebook and Twitter became important tools for the people in the Arab world who are seeking freedom from their dictators. We cannot help but exclaim, “Look, what massive servers! What magnificent LCD displays!” On the surface, there seems to be promising future for the mankind. Yet, if we look at the world today with spiritual eyes, there are signs of decay everywhere. Morality and spirituality in our society have been on the steady decline. One Northwestern University professor showed his students three people having sex in his classroom. He defended it as an innovative teaching method. Many people in our society consider themselves Christians just because they go to church on Sundays. Meanwhile, sin is eating away the souls of many people, like incurable cancer. We must open our eyes to see where this world is going. We must have a spiritual sense of history! All the glory of this world will crumble as did the temple of Herod the Great.

## II. “WATCH OUT THAT NO ONE DECEIVES YOU” (3-13)

Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple. Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” (3-4) The disciples were surprised and fascinated by Jesus’ prediction about the temple (it was like someone telling us in the 1990s that the twin towers of the World Trade Center would collapse soon). So they asked him two questions: the timing of the event and the telltale signs to watch for. Jesus answered the second question first, focusing more on the signs of the end of the age, although his disciples were more interested in the timing.

**First, watch out for false messiahs.** Look at verses 5-7. *Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.”* False messiahs are people or things that give false hopes to unsuspecting people. In a troubled world where wars, rumors of

wars, and all kinds of diseases and natural disasters are widespread, people seek to hold on to something or someone. False messiahs exploit people with fear and anxiety; they try to deceive them and empty their pockets. Who are these false messiahs? Some cult leaders are easy to spot (Jim Jones, Marshall Applewhite, ...). Other false messiahs are harder to recognize. Many people are deceived by materialism and hedonism for what they promise. They seek easygoing ways of life rather than the way of cross. Jesus says that we should not be deceived by these false messiahs.

**Second, “such things must happen...”** The end of the age is marked with many ominous and dreadful signs. Look at verses 7-8. *When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom will rise against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.* When the cold war was ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, people expressed euphoria, as if there wouldn't be any more wars. On the contrary, we have seen terrible wars, ethnic cleansing, and senseless killings in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Iraq and Afghanistan. My dentist is really worried about the nuclear threat from North Korea. There have also been terrible natural disasters. Earthquakes and Tsunamis in Chile, New Zealand, China, Philippines, and other areas took many lives. Hurricanes in Florida and Louisiana, floods in Europe, and typhoons in Asia destroyed lives and properties. People living in a world full of dreadful things become fearful. But God's people should not be gripped with fear. Instead, we must look at the world with a spiritual perspective. Jesus says in verse 7 that these things *must* happen. He did not say there's a high probability for these things to happen. He says that they must happen. But these calamities are not an end themselves. The end is still to come. The ominous signs are merely a warning signal.

Jesus also says in verse 8 that these are “the beginning of birth pains.” Birth pains are hard to endure. But mothers endure them because the joy of having a newborn baby more than compensates the pains. Likewise, the troubles and sufferings of the world are hard to endure, but they are a prelude of the glorious kingdom of God Jesus will bring. These sufferings have a meaning to believers. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. Let us remember this when we go through sufferings for Christ.



**Third, stand as his witnesses to them.** In the last days, the world will persecute the believers. Look at verse 9. *“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”* The first-century Christians were persecuted by the Jews as well as by the Roman authorities. Sometimes they were persecuted by their own family. It is especially painful to endure persecutions from our

own family members. Today, Christians in countries such as Pakistan and China are persecuted. They persecute Christians just because they obey God and follow Jesus instead of the world. We live in a free country. We can worship the Lord freely. Still we have the pressure to conform to the godless culture of our society. No one bothers us if we live as nominal Christians. But when we truly follow the Lord as his committed disciples, we are persecuted in subtle ways for being different.

What does Jesus want us to do in this situation? Look at verse 9b. *“On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”* He wants us to stand before the persecutors and clearly identify ourselves as witnesses of Jesus Christ. He promises in verse 13. *“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*

### III. “THE GOSPEL MUST FIRST BE PREACHED” (10)

Look at verse 10. *“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”* This verse teaches us the heart of God toward the sinful humanity. Jesus warned us that the world would hate us because of him as we follow him. And yet, he was mindful of the people who are dying because of their sins. He said, *“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”* Before the end comes, the gospel of Jesus Christ must be preached to all nations of the world. When terrible things happen to us, we try to find answers from this world. But Jesus says that our focus should be on the gospel. In the midst of many calamities, the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Why? Let us briefly review the human history. God created man and woman in his own image and put them in the Garden of Eden to be happy and to carry out the mission. But they rebelled against God and were cursed because of their sin. The paradise was lost. But God so loved the world that he prepared the long-term redemptive plan. Finally, he sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to give us eternal life. Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This is the gospel. God wants even one more person to come to him and be saved. This is the reason we must earnestly pray for world mission. This is the reason why our small 1:1 Bible studies are so important.

*“The gospel must first be preached to all nations.”* We have many things to do in this world. There are grades to be earned, diplomas to be obtained, languages to be mastered, programs to be written, and houses to be fixed. As a nation, the U.S. must regain competitiveness in international markets, tame the escalating budget deficits, reduce crimes, enhance education, bring down unemployment, and so on. But most importantly the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whatever we do, we must take into account the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives. May God help each one of us to preach the gospel of Jesus in the midst of our busy lives!

*“The gospel must first be preached to all nations.”* This verse gives us a clear direction in our life of mission. One difficulty of serving campus mission is that we have to start over--again and again. We feel we are trying to catch migrating birds with our hands. So we often become discouraged and sometimes become complacent. But

whether successful or not, we have to keep on sharing the gospel with young students. The gospel must first be preached. It should be our priority, not an extra-curricular activity. This is what Jesus wants us to do. May God help us to put the gospel ahead of anything and everything!

#### IV. THE ABOMINATION THAT CAUSES DESOLATION (14-25)

Overlooking the temple, Jesus continued his history lesson for his disciples. Look at verse 14. *“When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* The “abomination that causes desolation” has historical references. In 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes, the king of Aram, desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, offering the heads of pigs on the great altar. Antiochus inverted the creation order by placing an abominable thing where God should be. Another abominable event happened in A.D. 70, when the Roman army desecrated the temple. Thus, “abomination that causes desolation” refers to a person or thing that occupies God’s place in our hearts.

Money is useful to us but it becomes an abominable thing if we put it above God. That’s why Jesus warned his disciples not to be attached to material things in the last days. Look at verses 15-16. *“Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.”* It is foolish for anyone to lose life, trying to save a jacket. We should remember Lot’s wife.

God will bring many kinds of severe and unequalled disasters and catastrophes upon the people that worship abominable things (18-19). Because of them, all people will suffer. Especially, pregnant women and nursing mothers will suffer much. But Jesus promises to shorten the time of tribulations for the sake of the believers. Look at verse 20. *“If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.”*

Once again Jesus warns us to be wary of false prophets. They will appear in the name of Christ and even perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect whenever possible (21-22). But the time of tribulations will end with a climactic event of history—the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus. At that time, the whole universe will be shaken. Even the sun will be darkened and stars will fall. This day of the Lord will be good news to God’s people but it will be a terrible day for those who reject Jesus as their Savior. Jesus says in verse 23. *“So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.”*

In conclusion, Jesus tells us about the signs of the end times ahead of time so that we may be prepared. There will be false prophets, natural and man-made catastrophes, but we should not be alarmed because these things “must happen” and they are just beginnings of “birth pains.” What must we do in this troubled world? Shall we be like dead fish floating downstream? No! Jesus says that in this troubled world the first thing we must do is to preach the gospel to all people (10).