

Mark 13:1–23

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[0:00] And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, Look, teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings.

! And Jesus said to him, Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when will these things be?

And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished? And Jesus began to say to them, See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, I am he. And they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

[1:07] But be on your guard. For 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.

And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say. But say whatever is given you in that hour.

For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death. And the father his child. And children will rise against their parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be, let the reader understand.

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetops not go down, nor enter his house to take anything out.

[2:08] And let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days. Pray that it might not be in winter.

For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and will never be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved.

But for the sake of the elect whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then, if anyone says to you, look, here's the Christ. Or, look, there he is.

Do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard.

I have told you all things beforehand. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. This morning, I want to speak to you about your future.

[3:20] Father, we now come to your word. We ask you to speak as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word.

Take its truth, plant it deep in us, shape and fashion us into your likeness, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. What if you could know your future?

Two, five, ten, twenty years down the road, what would you want to know? Certainly, about your family. Possibly about your friends, the state of your relationships.

Will I be doing well? Poorly? Succeeding or struggling? You'll want to know, perhaps some of you, if you got through these difficult days.

You'll want to know the outcome of the lives of your friends and loved ones. How might it all play out? This morning, admittedly, we come to possibly the most challenging text in all the gospel of Mark.

[4:29] And I want us to be able to see it with simplicity and clarity. There is much detail. We could probably do an additional four to five sermons on this passage alone.

But our objective is to see the forest through the trees. And I've tagged our time simply this, or titled it, It Won't Be Easy.

It won't be easy. The Christian life will be hard. The life of Christian discipleship is one replete with difficulty, opposition, hardship, suffering, tribulations.

And like the Apostle Paul said, it will be through many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God. And what needs to be said from the outset this morning, my main point, Endurance is required for these last days.

Endurance will be required for these last days. The last days will be hard days. And these hard days require your endurance.

[5:41] If one were to craft a job description for a Christian, there must be a line that reads something along these lines. Ability to bear up under great difficulty and to endure.

It's not the most attractive sales pitch. Great difficulty. Hardship. Loss. There is no line waiting outside the building.

Sign me up. But Jesus is not trying to sell something to you. Jesus is trying to save you. Jesus is addressing the future for his disciples.

The final days. This is all predictive, this entire passage. Jesus has foretold several things up to this point. We know when he entered into Jerusalem, he said, hey, there's a cult over there.

Go and tie it. I need it. He has also predicted up to this point, I'm going to die. Three times. And here, once again, he predicts something to the disciples.

[6:52] Certainly to assert who he is. Divine. But they are, we have seen as readers, that God's sovereign purposes are coming to pass.

God has not leaving things up to a whim, but is orchestrating all things to accomplish his good will. And this is his game plan.

He will do it once again in this chapter. And it's necessary, we're aware. Peter, James, John, and Andrew, the fantastic four. The original four, as it would turn out.

But he's telling them something. You'll see it in verse 7. When you hear, verse 7. When they bring you to trial, verse 11.

When you see, verse 14. These are all things coming down the road. Fantastic. For I am telling you these things beforehand.

[7:53] Verse 23. What does your future hold? I want to take this text in three blocks. Deception.

Forewarned. Difficulty. Forecast. And lastly, desolation. Foretold.

Deception. Deception. Forewarned. Difficulty. Forecast. And desolation. Foretold. Cumulatively. Cumulatively. They will show that the last days will be hard days.

And endurance will be needed. Well, verse 13. Chapter 13 begins. The disciples are now exiting the temple.

They entered as early as chapter 11. And now they are leaving the temple precincts. And one of them blurts out what marvelous, what wonderful buildings these are.

[8:58] You see, the temple was the beauty and splendor of all of Jerusalem. It was the heart of Judaism. It was a sight to behold. The grounds themselves covered 25 football fields.

It was surrounded by double colonnades. I don't know. What am I? Similar to the height of our building outside. 47 feet in height.

162 in number. The circumference of them required three adult men to hold hands to encompass. And at its center of the temple grounds stood the temple itself.

15 stories high. The cornerstones of the foundation of the temple. Single blocks. Roughly 100 tons in weight.

The largest foundation stone sits roughly 570 tons. 10 feet tall. 15 feet deep. 45 feet in length.

[10:08] It was one of the marvels of the ancient world. Constructed or renovated by Herod the Great. It dwarfed the Parthenon in Athens.

It towered above the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. It made Greek temples look tiny.

Josephus, a Jewish historian, writes about this temple. It was covered in gold plates of gold of great weight. And at the first rising of the sun, the sun reflected back a very fiery splendor. And made those who looked at it force themselves to turn their eyes away. He could not stare at it because of how the gold shined.

The temple appeared to strangers, he would write, from a distance. Like a mountaintop covered with snow. And so Jesus, knowing all these things, Jesus' statement is baffling to the disciples. [11:14] It's inconceivable. Unfathomable. Certainly it's an architectural feat. But more so, Jesus, this is the religious epicenter of all of Judaism.

It is here the people of God gather. It is here we derive our identity. It is here where everything of significance happens. It was there the sacrifices of the people would be met by the mercy of God and forgiveness extended.

Could it be true, Jesus? Could this temple actually fall? Well, it will fall, as we'll see.

See, the heart of Judaism would be shattered, as Jesus foretells of its destruction. The stones in which they marvel would all be thrown down.

And if you go to the Temple Mount today, you will see its very remains. Massive stones in heaps. Seemingly immovable because of their sheer size.

[12:23] And considering the impending destruction of the Temple, Jesus now goes into his longest teaching section of the Gospel.

It's rivaled only by chapter 4. The Temple will fall. But I can't help but think that even here it has a double meaning. The physical Temple will fall.

But Jesus is anticipating, as we'll see in the next chapter, that he himself, the Temple, will also fall. So let me lay out the game plan, disciples.

Let me lay out the game plan. Deception forewarned. It's inconceivable to the disciples. How could it be possible? And so, as they're sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking into Jerusalem at the Temple, two questions come to mind.

When will these things happen? And what will be the sign that these things are about to be accomplished? When and what are we looking for?

[13:29] Next week's text that Pastor Pace will handle will answer the question, when? This morning's text answers the what. And Jesus forewarns the disciples of future deception.

His warning spans the entirety of the text, as you saw in verse 22 and 23 as well. In the days ahead, there will come imitators.

There will come quasi-messiahs whose aim is to lead others astray. There will come those who draw attention to themselves, attracting a large following, only to be false.

They will even predict, or they will even do miracles, signs, and wonders, and if even possible, dupe believers. The warning is that there will be counterfeit Christ.

Prophets claiming his authority, but they are not him. Acts tells us there were figures like this in the early church, messianic in claim, but false in character. Acts 5, Judas and Judas the Galilean, men who claimed to be somebodies, but in the end amounted to nobodies.

[14:43] In our day, you might be familiar with incidents in Jonestown, Iana, and Waco, Texas. Individuals claiming to be Christ, only to lead their followers to death.

And you and I might think, well, how gullible or how foolish must you be? But the deception of the devil is great. If being led astray was no issue, Jesus wouldn't have mentioned it.

Rather, in double emphasis, he asserts it. Many will be led astray. Authorities, rulers, charismatic individuals will deceive many.

And it certainly applies to our time today. Personas of sort, messianic complexes that try to draw people with anti-Christian ideas.

There are those who draw and affect many. There are personalities that will be subtle with their deception and they will mislead. But I wonder in our day if it's not just an individual or a cult of personality.

[15:55] But I wonder if it goes beyond persons. What about ideologies? Cultural narratives? Subtle loves? Idols that stand in place of Christ and they shout to you and to me.

Look at me. Listen to me. Come to me. I can save you. Counterfeits.

Trying to beat Christ. Be aware of the deception. Counterfeit Christ are at work trying to undo the faith of many.

It won't be easy. Be on your guard. Deception. Forewarned. And it's followed by difficulty forecast. In addition to deceptive individuals and ideas, there will come immense difficulty.

Jesus anticipates this. As some will think cosmic catastrophes, conflicts, natural disasters, these large devastations, they are going to be the sign of the end.

[17:01] That's what you and I often think. That's how we, what we consider today. Natural disasters of increasing magnitude. The threat of another world war.

Humanitarian crises of immense proportions. Wayward asteroids even. Have a saying with the popular song, it's the end of the world as we know it.

Interestingly, Jesus does not make a big deal of these phenomena. He says they are not actually signs.

These will take place in the end. Admittedly, they have always taken place and they will continue to take place. They do not signal the end. Do not be alarmed, he says.

Don't worry about that. They're merely birth pains. What we think is the end, he is saying, is but the beginning.

[17:58] He equates them with the birthing process, particularly the beginning of birth pains.

These are but contractions. Maybe the Braxton Hicks kind. Signs that birthing is near.

And as many mothers know and fathers have learned, the birthing process is filled with pain and uncertainty. How long will it last?

Unsure from what I've gathered. Seems it's always longer than desired. And Jesus is saying your focus is misplaced if you're looking at those things.

Rather, he gets to the heart of the matter. You want to know what the sign is when all these things are about to be accomplished? Yes, the world and the created order will be having a hard time.

But let me tell you who else will be having a hard time. You. The disciples. They will be delivered to councils.

[19:03] Beaten in synagogues. Stand before kings and governors. There would be great opposition to the cause of Christ. Political and religious powers would come up against them.

They would be condemned. Family members would turn against one another to the point of death.

Betrayal by loved ones. Hated by all. The disciples were to expect scorn, ridicule, hatred.

Sign me up. Sign me up. They were to learn what it would mean to take up their cross to follow Jesus.

They were to experience what it would mean to lose their lives for Christ's sake. The shape of a disciple's life is the shape of Jesus' life.

Betrayed. Handed over. Brought before governors. Beaten. Mocked. Killed. That's the template of your future. This is the great irony.

[20:09] The paradox of how the gospel expands. It's through the suffering. Through their suffering. The kingdom of God silently advances as they proclaim the gospel in the midst of their trials and tribulations.

Did you catch that? They will deliver you over. While you're there, you bear witness to them.

And note this priority, verse 10. And the gospel will go to all the nations. As the disciples would face difficulty, as they were bearing witness, the gospel would be proclaimed and the conquering power of the message of the gospel would go forth.

This is God's game plan. The lives of the messengers. The disciples and now us would serve the message.

The servants of the gospel will suffer at the cost of their very physical well-being. Their reputations. Their very families. Because the gospel is precious.

[21:20] Paul uses this image that in our bodies, we as jars of clay, we house, we house the treasure of the gospel.

And the picture goes, sometimes the jar needs to shatter in order for the gospel to go forth. And as we see it in the early church, it comes at the cost of lives.

But that's how precious the gospel is. And if you're wondering and you came in today, you're like, who is this Jesus? Why does he mean so much to us? Because I believe that Christ in me is the greatest hope for all the world.

And if it might cost my reputation, it might cost my very family, it might cost my very life, but that message is so precious.

And if it goes forth and is birthed, that message can save. And it will not only save those who receive it, it will save myself. But you're dead being. Well, that's the glory of the gospel.
[22 : 32] That though I die, he could and would and will raise me. That's the beauty of the gospel.

That's why men and women give themselves to this cause. Take my life. He will keep it. Well, Armando Valadez is a Cuban-American poet, diplomat, human rights activist.

He grew up under the Fidel Castro regime. Imprisoned at the age of 23. Sentenced to 22 years because he failed to put a placard on his desk that said, I'm with Fidel.

In his memoirs, *Against All Hope*, he records torture, solitary confinement, starvation. 13 visits in 22 years.

That's all he got. He describes being put in prison and the guards coming to take away the Christians to the firing squad.

[23 : 37] He had little to no belief in God at the time until he saw these men going to their deaths. These Christians went to their deaths with shouts of Viva Cristo Rey.

Viva Cristo Rey. And then he writes, those cries of the executed patriots, long live Christ the King. Awaken me to new life.

They echoed through the 200-year-old moats of this fortress he was shackled in. And he records in 1963. This is amazing.

Those cries were so potent and a stirring symbol that in 1963, those condemned to death were gagged before they went to the firing squad.

Silenced. Why? Because the jailers feared their shouts. As men were executed.

[24 : 51] Long live Christ the King. Armando Valadaris came to saving faith. We live in a time where it's considered strange to the Bible story, to be honest.

A day and age where there is freedom of religion. Unimaginable in Jesus' day or the early church. Yet with our privilege, let us not be oblivious to the realities of the rest of the world.

Think of our global ministry partners. Go ask Catherine in the Middle East. What's your experience? Go ask Ruby in South Asia.

How is it for you? Go ask the Webbers in Cameroon. Do you face this? It's strange to us.

But true to them. We certainly don't seek out these things. We ought not to be surprised. But we ought not to be surprised by difficulty in the Christian life.

[26 : 01] It's the very indication of your genuineness of faith. And don't be surprised when a fiery trial comes upon you to test you as if something strange were happening to you.

Insults for the name of Christ. Suffering because of your Savior. Visible or tangible signs. These visible and tangible signs are signs of your very salvation.

It won't be easy. You'll face deception. You'll face difficulty. You must endure. Lastly, there's a desolation forthcoming.

Jesus has been explaining what will be the sign. What will be the sign. And in verses 14 to 23, he provides the most tangible sign.

It is an impending desolation. It's an event so horrific or frightening and terrible that he, instead of standing trial before kings, you run.

[27 : 07] Just run. Flee. Do whatever you can to preserve your life. Those days will be so bad. You don't want to be pregnant. You don't want to have it in the winter.

I forgot Matthew or Luke said, I hope it's not the Sabbath. But you've got to run. Run. When you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be, you must run.

Now, for the sake of time, you've got to run faster. But a few things to note. And I'll try to... Probably most questions about this one, right?

So, we need to see a few things. It's Bible code, this abomination of desolation. Mark actually gives us that little clue.

Let the reader understand. You need to know that this has happened before. This abomination of desolation. Or abomination that leads to desolation. Or something so heinous, detestable, violating that would result in something be laid to waste.

[28 : 17] The term is not new to our Bibles. It's found in the book of Daniel. And for the sake of time, we won't turn there. Lastly, the final few chapters.

There you see abomination of desolation. But in summary, Daniel has a vision concerning a transgression or a violation of the sacrificial system in the temple.

And from that, Daniel 11, 31, there's forces that will appear and profane the temple. And they shall take away the burnt offering.

They'll destroy the sacrificial system. And they'll set up something, an abomination that makes desolate. And when you see that, Jesus says, that's the cue to run.

That's the cue to run. Something, horror and destruction is coming your way. And according to Jewish history, I'm going to speed up a little quicker so I talk a little faster.

[29 : 17] First Maccabees, the author identifies it as taking place in 168 BC. The abomination of desolation. Daniel's abomination of desolation. Antiochus, Epiphany, a Greek king who is a terror to the Jews, comes and erects a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering.

Namely, a statue of Zeus. And all the while, they're burning books of the law and destroying the temple. And Jesus is saying, remember that.

Something like that is about to take place in similar lines. And so Jesus imports Daniel's language. And he says, something like that, that happened in the temple, is going to happen again.

The result will be catastrophic. And this is where the text becomes controversial. But I want to make you aware. People are asking, has this happened? Is it happening? Or will it happen later?

Has it already happened? Was it a historical event? Will it happen? You know, some people will say, it will happen. It's a future date. And if that be the case, you would need a temple.

[30 : 32] And right now, there isn't a temple. And so people are trying to build a new temple somehow. Because they need to see this fulfilled. But I don't think that's the case. I think it was already fulfilled. But it happened, according to Jewish historian Josephus.

In the late 60s AD, Titus, general, Roman general, lay siege to Jerusalem. It was horrific. 97,000 people were taken captive.

According to Josephus' numbers, 1.1 million perished by slow starvation and sword. The famine was so bad, the Jewish people resorted to eating one another.

Josephus writes, the upper rooms were full of women and children dying of starvation. And history tells us that once Jerusalem was choked to death, Titus' armies entered and burned the temple to the ground.

They plundered its furnishings. Furnishings. All that was foretold by Jesus. What was told in 33 AD comes to pass in 70 AD. And today, if you end up a tourist in Rome, you can see it.

[31 : 39] Titus' arch, right next to the Colosseum. There, the arch was built to receive him back to Rome after he vanquished Jerusalem.

And there, there's depictions, carvings all over of his army carrying out the golden lampstand, the menorah, carrying out the table of showbread. All in triumph.

All according to what Jesus said. You see, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 was horrific. It's a striking verse, and I'll use it as my conclusion.

That if God did not shorten those days for the elect, no human being would be saved. God's mercy met his people in their misery.

The last days are hard days. But we must endure. And lest we think it is our endurance or fortitude that saves us.

[32 : 51] The text corrects us. Certainly, we must endure and remain steadfast. We are to persevere and stay on the straight and narrow and not be led astray.

We are to continue and not be alarmed by the catastrophes, disasters, and war that encompass us. And if all the armies of Satan rise up against us and the powers of the world overwhelm us and crush us, be assured of this.

Jesus has interceded. He has intervened. Though our physical life may not endure, the promises of God will still endure.

Though heaven and earth will perish, as we'll see next week, you will not. He has interceded. And his intercession will be seen in the next few chapters.

The temple is destroyed. The earth will give way. The kings and empires will rage on. Christians will be trampled underfoot. And the days ahead may be so horrific that you cannot endure.

[34 : 00] But you can be assured of this. God's promises are for your preservation. Jesus will never lose one of his own. In the poetic words of the modern hymn writer, we will close with this song.

He'll not let your soul be lost. His promises shall last. Bought by him at such a cost, he will hold you fast.

And in his mercy and majesty, he'll raise you to life triumphantly. And you will stand over every enemy, victorious over every foe.

And so, may he grant you endurance for these days. Father, we are reminded it won't be easy. And if that has been our experience, easy Christianity, then embolden us. Embolden us to be bearers of the gospel.

[35 : 16] To attest to the message of Jesus. And there we would find that some will hate us. That family might disown us.

That governments will be against us. But, it is how the gospel advances. And so, at the cost of our very lives, may the gospel go forth.

Give us endurance. Perseverance. May we not lose heart in doing good. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.