

“THE TEMPLE’S DOOM AND THINGS TO COME.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: Mark 13:1-13

Introduction.

Any fans here of the movie *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*? This morning we will look at a temple’s doom, the great temple in Jerusalem.

As we turn the page to a new chapter in the Gospel of Mark we come to the longest section of Jesus’ teaching and to what is called His farewell discourse.

We have to be careful interpreting these texts. First, this is one of the most Jewish chapters in the NT in terms of Jewish history. Second, this chapter contains predictions of future events and sometimes it’s easy to get confused as to how far in the future the events are. Are they during the time of the NT or are they about things that haven’t happened yet?

Some of the events are far off such as the return of the Son of Man in the final judgment and some events are near such as the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem.

Mark 13:1-2.

Mark 13:1-2 And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” 2 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.”

The great temple of Jerusalem was Herod the Great’s obsession. He started building it around 20BC and parts were still being worked on 50 years later. He employed 10,000 workers who labored year after year. He was intent on making it far grander and more permanent than Solomon’s great temple. It sat on a 35 acre site covering 12 football fields.

Today you can go to the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall, and enter through what is called Wilson’s Arch and see some of the below ground foundation stones just north of the temple area.

Within Wilson’s Arch is a stone called the *Western Stone*. It measures 44 feet long, 15 feet wide and 11 feet high and weighs over a million pounds. It’s one of the largest building blocks in the world and is considered to be one of the heaviest

objects ever lifted by human beings without powered machines. The heaviest stones in the pyramids in Egypt only weighed five thousand pounds.

The magnitude of the area around the temple and the stones used to construct it exceed in size any temple in the ancient world. The size wasn't the only magnificent thing. The temple glistened in the sun as it was made of marble and covered in gold and silver and bronze.

These humble Galilean fishermen were dazzled by the sight. They were really impressed. They never imagined it possible that it wouldn't stand forever. So we can imagine their shock at Jesus' response to their awe.

“As Jesus came out of the temple.”

This isn't just a casual statement. It symbolizes Jesus' final break with the temple and all it represented. He had challenged the authority of the Sanhedrin and every group that made up the Sanhedrin; He had violently thrown out the money-changers who made it a den of robbers. He had announced His judgment on it all in the cursing and withering of the fig tree.

Jesus left the temple never to return. Its purpose in God's plan of salvation was over and its days were numbered. The temple's God-ordained purpose had been perverted, it was no longer a house of prayer and no longer a place of worship to the true God. Its leaders had rejected the very God they were supposed to worship.

Jesus simply stated matter of factly not one stone would be left standing on another. To reject God is to invite judgment. It doesn't matter how great the building is or how powerful the nation is or how nice a person you are.

Mark 13:3-8.

They left the temple mound going east, crossed down into a small valley, the Kidron Valley, and then up the Mount of Olives which rises three hundred feet above Jerusalem and overlooks the temple area. There are olive groves on the Mount of Olives that are at least 1500 years old. Sitting among the olive trees the small band of disciples could survey the temple area and the glistening, gleaming temple itself.

From this vantage point Jesus delivers His final judgment against the temple.

The disciples were still trying to wrap their head around what Jesus said. Not one stone left standing? Really? How can such a thing be? This was incomprehensible to the disciples.

The disciple's eyes were bugging out when they saw the size of the stones and now their jaws were dropping when Jesus treats them as just a bunch of Legos or maybe Duplos.

The disciples ask two questions.

When will these things be?

What will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?

The only thing they can possibly figure was that if the great temple was about to come down then Jesus must be about ready to raise up His own kingdom in even great splendor. It must be soon right? They still had no concept of a cross before the crown. They wanted the harvest without any planting; the delivery without the labor; the trophy while still standing on the starting line.

Jesus answered their questions one at a time. And in doing so Jesus announced two great judgments, a Jewish one and a universal one. We will look at the first half of the first answer this morning.

The first answer involved the shocking prediction regarding the destruction of the temple and that not one massive stone would be left standing on another.

In our text Jesus gives four mile markers or signposts that point toward the destruction of the temple and what would follow. Over the next four decades every detail of Jesus' prophecy would be fulfilled and it would culminate in the destruction of the temple in 70AD.

The first three are external, the final one personal and both beginning with a warning to watch out and be on your guard.

First, there will be false messiahs (13:5; 21-23). But don't be deceived or fall for their deception, they are like wolves in sheep's clothing.

Second, there will be wars and rumors of wars (13:7). But don't be thrown off guard, I have told you that these things would and must happen.

Third, there will be earthquakes and famines (13:8). But again these are only the beginning.

Fourth, the disciples will be persecuted (13:9-11). The one who endures to the end will be saved.

All of these things happened between 40 and 70AD. Let me very briefly recount for you some of the historical details to show you how accurately Jesus prophesied what would happen.

First, there were many messianic pretenders. Around 45AD Theudas claimed messianic powers and led over four hundred astray (Acts 5:36). Simon Magus impressed many in Samaria (Acts 8:9). There is an account of an Egyptian who claimed to be a prophet and deceived many. There were numerous insurrectionist who claimed divine inspiration to lead the people against Rome.

Second, there was great political upheaval. In 40AD emperor Caligula threatened war in Palestine and in 66AD there was a civil war in Palestine.

68-69AD were known as ***the year of the four emperors***. Nero lost favor with the Roman senate and committed suicide in 68AD and four emperors followed in quick succession, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian. It was a time of great political confusion and upheaval never before seen in Rome. There were several wars during this time across the Roman Empire.

Third, there were five or six major earthquakes and many smaller ones documented in the histories of that time including: Crete 46AD, Rome 51AD, Phrygia 53 and 60AD (central Turkey), and Pompey which was leveled in 63AD (Italy, Naples area south of Rome).

There were at least three great famines. Acts 11 records the great famine in Judea 44AD.

Acts 11:27-28 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

Add to that famines in Greece 50AD and Rome 52AD. In addition 65AD was the worst year for both famines and earthquakes.

Fourth, we know the emperor Nero instigated great persecution, especially against Christians. This was a time when families were split apart and brothers betrayed brothers, fathers betrayed children and children betrayed parents.

The Roman senator and historian, Tacitus, wrote a history of the Roman Empire. The prologue begins:

"The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars, and often both at the same time. (*The Histories*, 1.2).

Everything was just as Jesus said. But it's not all doom and gloom. Jesus leaves them with *three promises* that remind us that all suffering for the sake of Jesus has purpose.

The Gospel will be preached to all nations. The gates of hell won't be able to stop it.

Those who suffer for the Gospel will have special help from the Holy Spirit in their time of need.

Those who persevere to the end will reap a great reward.

Mark 13:13 "The one who endures to the end will be saved."

II Corinthians 4:7-11 We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Application and Conclusion.

Why does Jesus teach the disciples these things and why does He mean for us to know these things? To make us fearful and anxious? To stir up more rumors? To get us to speculate and make predictions?

Jesus warns again and again, watch out that no one deceives you. Be on your guard. Be watchful and ready. These signs are not signs of the end but signs that the end is coming. They are present signs to warn us of a future coming. They are to keep us vigilant and obedient.

Jesus says again and again, don't speculate about the future, be obedient and faithful in the present. Jesus doesn't intend to give us a blueprint or a map for the future, rather He intends to give us confidence in the God who controls all things; in the God who has a purpose and a plan and who is present with us through all things.

The life of faith is not an exemption from adversity and affliction, but a promise to be saved through it in eternal life.

Jesus is warning His disciples and us not to be upset or frustrated or surprised or put off by scandals and affliction and heresy and betrayal and suffering and evil.

Beware the false preachers who preach wealth and health in this life because we are the king's kids. Beware of the wolves in sheep's clothing who promise a life of ease and comfort and pleasure for all who just have faith.

And beware of those who speculate about times and dates and places. Don't be deceived. But don't be foolish either. Live ready. Live lives of holiness, obedience, faithfulness.

Jesus says all these things are only the beginning of the birth pangs, they are not the end. These things must take place but when they do the end is not yet.

When all these things happened it wasn't the end of the world, it wasn't the end of the church either. The great trials and persecutions and downsizing of the church only led to a greater and unprecedented expansion of the kingdom of God to all nations. The birth pains led to new life.

Jesus is saying that persecution will be the norm, trouble and trials must be expected. This long season of relative peace and ease in the United State has made us lazy and inattentive. We have become soft and complacent, we expect ease and comfort and pleasure to rule our days. And we have become insensitive to the terrible suffering of our brothers and sisters around the world.

We have to have Sunday's like today designated *International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church* to wake up the Church in America to what's happening in the rest of the world.

Christianity has become the most persecuted faith in the world. Currently over 200 million Christians worldwide live in 130 countries where they face hatred and persecution every day. They are despised by Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, communists, secular pagans, by all those who hate Christ and are enemies of His Gospel.

The 11 countries where Christians suffer the most extreme persecution are, in order, starting with the worst, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, The Maldives, Mali, Iran, Yemen, Eritrea and Syria.

More Christians were martyred for their faith in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined, over twenty million. And the pace has not slowed. Over 165,000 Christians are martyred for their faith each year.

Nigeria: Christians suffered terror from Muslim extremists, whole villages are massacred.

Iran: If a Muslims converts he is put to death.

India: up to 70,000 Christians in the predominately Hindu eastern state of Orissa have been forced to flee their homes in riots against Christians.

Indonesia: Muslims are slaughtering Christians by the tens of thousands.

Iraq: half of Iraq's Christians have fled the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Egypt: Under Islamist pressure, Coptic Christians are being forced from their homes.

Syria: most of the 80,000 Christians in the city of Homs had been 'cleansed' from their homes.

Christians around the world are bearing the worst afflictions, slavery, kidnapped for sex trafficking, imprisonment, hard labor camps, forced into refugee camps, raped, tortured, falsely accused, intimidated, their places of worship destroyed.

I urge us to remember to pray for persecuted Christians and in so praying to prepare ourselves and our children if we should be counted worthy to suffer for Jesus.

Pray for them and for their practical needs:

Pray persecuted believers would know the hope God gives (Ephesians 1:8).

Pray the Holy Spirit would strengthen them (Ephesians 3:16).

Pray persecuted believers would know how much God loves them (Ephesians 3:17).

Pray they would know how to share the gospel (Ephesians 6:19).

Pray persecuted believers would fearlessly tell others about Jesus (Ephesians 6:20).

Pray for believers who have been rejected by family and friends. Pray that God would surround them with a new Christian "family" who loves them and supports them emotionally and physically and that they will have access to Bibles and places to worship with fellow believers.

Pray for God to be an advocate for women and children who are socially vulnerable or have been widowed or orphaned and left destitute.

Pray that God would provide persecuted believers with jobs and safe places to live and worship.

Pray that God will grant them the courage and endurance to endure to the end and pray that we will grow in our own faith and courage that we too will be found faithful to the very end.

In this life Jesus said we will have affliction, and more is coming. We have until now been spared much of what the world has faced. But the time may come when we will be shaken. Let us not trust in what can be shaken but only in what cannot be shaken. The largest stones on earth were toppled, but our faith stands firm on the foundation of Christ who is our Rock and our Redeemer.