**The Gospel Must First Be Preached**

November 10, 2013

Mark 13:1-23

Key Verse: 13:10 “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

Today, Jesus teaches us about the signs of the end of the age. There will be deceptions, famines, persecutions, terrors, wars, and tribulations--these are the signs of the end of the age. But in the middle of all these catastrophic events our first priority is to preach the gospel in this world. Today, we confront many world problems that we never experienced before. Can we conclude that we are seeing the end of the world in our generation? Perhaps. I pray that God may bless us to endure many hardships in these end times to preach the gospel to all campuses and to devote ourselves to the Bible study and prayer.

Look at verse 1. As we know, the disciples were the country boys and they were fascinated by the size and beauty of the temple. So one disciple exclaimed, “Look, Teacher, What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” The disciples were amazed to look at the beauty of the massive stones of the temple buildings. The Jerusalem Temple, built by Herod over a period of 46 years, was a marvel to behold. It sat on the highest point in Jerusalem and occupied 1/6 of the city’s territory. It was built of huge marble stones, some of which were 37 feet long, 18 feet wide and 12 feet high. People said, “You have not seen anything beautiful if you have not seen Herod’s Temple.” Therefore, the disciples thought that the Temple would last forever. They were overwhelmed by the outward appearance of the Temple.

In the previous chapter Jesus did not look at the amount of money offered by the worshipers, he looked at the heart. He was most impressed with a widow’s tiny offering, because she had offered all that she had, by faith, even though it was small. So when Jesus looks at the temple, or at church buildings today, he is not impressed by the external look, or stained glass windows, but by the faith of the members. The disciple’s minds were occupied by their worldly human dreams for the glittering things of this world. Their hearts had already been impressed by the elegant and pompous high priests’ garment. So some of them shouted, “Look! Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” Indeed, the temple buildings were magnificent, representing the culture and civilization of the day. Maybe he expected Jesus to say “Amen,” and join him in admiring magnificence of the temple.

Look at verse 2. Jesus answered them, “Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” This was a prediction of the imminent doom of Herod’s temple in Jerusalem. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem fell to the besieging army of Roman General Titus. He desecrated the temple and demolished it completely until not one stone was left on another. The Roman soldiers were led to believe there was secret gold hidden in the temple, so they literally tore it apart stone by stone, looking for the loot that wasn’t there. Jesus’ prophesy concerning the temple building was also an allegory of the earth and civilization. Our modern civilization boasts about the global village connected by the high speed Internet. The whole world watched as hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center, and as the Twin Towers collapsed via live television broadcasts. Nobody imagined that the tall magnificent Twin Towers would be collapsed so quickly. But as Jesus said, nothing is permanent in this world. We can see the rise and fall of the human civilization throughout world history.

What was the disciples’ response? Look at verses 3-4. “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite 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 about to be fulfilled?’” They thought that the destruction of the temple meant the end of the world. So they asked for a timetable and a sign. But Jesus talked about things to watch out. Look at verses 5-6. “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.’” Why? To the disciples’ mind, the destruction of the temple and the end of the world are simultaneous events. But to Jesus, there is a time gap between the destruction of the temple and the end of the world. So Jesus tells his disciples how to live between those two events. This is called “Grace period.” God could have destroyed all mankind when the temple was destroyed. But in his grace he gave us grace period.

How should we live in the grace period?

**First,** watch out that no one deceives you. Look at verses 5-6 again. “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.’” Jesus was concerned about his disciples’ vulnerability to the things of the world. Many false saviors promise security and happiness and lead people away from God. Look at verses 21-23. “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect--if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.” Jesus was right. Christian history proves that there were so many false prophets who deceived so many people. They manipulated people’s fear to lead them astray.

Look again at the commands in these verses. In verse 5 Jesus says “watch out,” and the word he uses means “be prepared.” Verse 7 says “don’t be alarmed,” which means “don’t be caught unprepared.” Some think that these commands are permission to speculate, to chart out the last days, even to the point of identifying the antichrist, setting dates, and pinpointing the battle of Armageddon. But that’s exactly the opposite of what these commands mean. Jesus is telling us to be clear headed and sober minded in times of turmoil and crisis.   
  
When I was a little boy I would sometimes get scared when I was at home alone. When that happened, I noticed every single noise in the house. I would hear every creak in the floor, every bush blowing in the wind, every squeak in the walls. My imagination would run wild, and I would be sure that someone was trying to get in, that some crazed axe murderer was outside. Now when I was like that, was I clear headed? I was certainly paying close attention to what was happening around me. But I was not clear headed. My imagination and fears were causing me to read into every creak and squeak. The same kind of thing happens to Christians during times of world crisis.

Jesus said in verse 8, “Nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of the birth pains.” In addition to wars, there are many natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, and earthquakes and tsunamis. These are painful and tragic. But Jesus said that we must see them as the beginning of birth pains. The new life is coming. When we hear of wars and disasters, we must realize that the kingdom of God is coming soon. When the kingdom of God comes, all pain and suffering of this world will be forgotten. We will enter into a time of joy and peace and love with God. While others live in fear of nuclear war, global warming, killer viruses and even astroids falling from the sky, we Christians should be different. We should be full of hope in the coming kingdom of God and ready for action.

**Second**, we should stand firm. 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.” Jesus told them that they would receive intensive persecutions. Acts 1:8b says, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Here the word “witness” symbolizes “martyrdom.” Jesus said in verse 9a, “You must be on your guard.” Jesus did not express his human sympathy for his people, but he told them to prepare themselves to endure their persecution by faith. In addition, through much persecution, they have to witness Jesus to the anti-Christians by standing firm in the faith. At that time, Christians were usually summoned to the authorities and were asked if they would defy the name of Jesus or claim his name. If they defied his name they were free to go. If anyone claimed his name, he became a martyr. When Bishop Polycarp was asked to deny Jesus’ name for his life, he said, “Jesus my Lord never denied me so how could I deny him.” He was happy to die for the name of Jesus. In the early church, persecutions broke out and many Bible teachers were scattered throughout the world. At that time persecutions became a time of opportunity to witness before the kings and governors. In this way the early Christians turned the time of suffering to a time of opportunity. Persecutions refine our faith like a pure gold. Persecutions make us grow from baby Christians to mature Christians.

**Third**, we should preach the gospel. Look at verse 10. “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” What should be our number one priority in this troubled world? It is to preach the gospel to all nations. Jesus said in Mark 16:15, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Jesus wants to save people one by one, and so finally save all the people. Jesus taught that the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Jesus had great world mission vision. At that time Jesus’ disciples were very narrow-minded and nationalistic. They did not have visas to go Rome. They did not have money to buy tickets to go to Rome. It was unrealistic for them. It was impractical for them. It was risky for them. But Jesus told them to preach the gospel to all nations including the world superpower Roman Empire. Jesus’ world mission command was not an option but it was a “must.” Jesus wanted to save all nations before he comes again to judge the living and the dead. To our surprise, the disciples obeyed Jesus’ world mission command and conquered the world with the gospel of Jesus. They conquered the Roman Empire with the gospel of Jesus. The people at Wycliffe Bible Translators recently accelerated their goal for Bible translation. A few years ago, it was to translate the Bible into every spoken language and dialect by 2075. Recently, they moved the target date to 2025 because of urgency. In UBF we pray to send 100,000 missionaries to all nations by 2041. The world mission is urgent.

Here we learn how to live in this troubled world. All people hope for an easy life, in this confused world. We want to marry. We want to have a sweet home. We want to make money. We want to dream dreams. We want to live well and eat well and enjoy the world as long as possible. But we don’t know what to do next, even though we live as Christians. What must we do in this troubled world? Do we just follow other worldly people? Shall we be a dead fish floating downstream or do we have to be men and women of God who know the birth pains of the coming kingdom of God? In this troubled world the first thing we must do is to preach the gospel to all people.

The future will be filled with trials and tribulations just like the present is. As Christians we will continue to live in a broken sin filled world. We must remember God’s love for His elect even through suffering. This is true now as well as during the tribulation. His protection is generally not from pain, but through pain. The church will be purified further in this age than ever because the nominal believers will fall away. And all those that do endure to the end will be saved.

In the days before Connecticut became a state, the colonial legislature was in session when a thick black cloud blocked out the sunlight. Someone shouted, “It is the Day of Judgment Let’s go home and get ready.” But one member of the legislature, who happened to be an old church deacon, stood up and said, “Brethren, it may be The Day of Judgment--I do not know. The Lord may come. But when he does, I want him to find me at my post, doing my duty up to the very last moment. Mr. Speaker, I move that candles be brought in and that we get on with the business of the colony.” In the same way, as we have seen in recent days, the signs are pointing to the fact that Jesus could return at any moment. But until he does, our duty as his servants is to make the best use of our talents and our opportunities. We need to continue doing the business of his kingdom, by sharing the Gospel message of his Love and his Grace with everyone that is lost and dying in their sins.