**The Gospel Must First Be Preached to All Nations**

October 4, 2020

Mark 13:1-23

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

In this passage Jesus teaches us about the signs of the end of the age. There will be deceptions, famines, persecutions, earthquakes, wars, diseases--these are the signs of the end of the age. These signs make us fearful. Today, we confront many world problems which we never experienced before, especially COVID-19 pandemic. Can we conclude that we are seeing the end of the world in our generation? I don’t know. In this situation, our natural tendency is self-preservation, trying to survive. But in the middle of all these catastrophic events, our first priority should be to preach the gospel to all nations, instead of giving into fear. I pray that God may bless us to endure many hardships in these end times to preach the gospel to all campuses of all nations.

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 Jerusalem Temple, built by Herod over a period of 46 years, was a marvel to behold. It was still being built. It sat on the highest point in Jerusalem which is 780m above sea level and occupied 1/6 of the city’s territory. When the sun shone on the temple, the dazzling reflection captured the mind’s eye of any observer. It was built of huge marble stones, some of which were 37 feet long, 18 feet wide and 12 feet high. One stone weighed more than 100 tons. It is remarkable that they brought the heavy stones to the top of the mountain. 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 would not be impressed by the external look, or stained glass windows, but by the faith of the members.

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 gold 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 in 2001. 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.’” 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.” When you buy a thing using a credit card, you are given around 20 days which you don’t have to pay without interest. It 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 Messiah!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false messiahs 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 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. Luke 21:9 says, “When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.” 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. 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 hurricanes, and earthquakes and tsunamis. Luke 21:11 says, “There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.” 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. Many people live in fear of nuclear war, climate change, COVID-19 and even asteroid falling from the sky. They say that climate change alarmism such as “the world is ending in 15 years”, is contributing to rising anxiety and depression among teenagers. But we Christians should be different. We should be full of hope in the coming kingdom of God.

**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 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 deny the name of Jesus or claim his name. If they denied 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. For example, St. Paul was on trial before governors Felix and Festus and King Agrippa. Paul used these opportunities to testify about Jesus. They were convicted by Paul’s message and told Paul to be quiet, saying, “You are insane.” In this way the early Christians turned the time of suffering to a time of opportunity.

**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 Jews who hated the Gentiles. They did not have visas to go to Rome. They did not have money to buy airplane 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 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 troubled 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 then what? Many people don’t know what to do next. 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 are aware of 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. The church will be purified through persecutions and the nominal believers will fall away. But all those that stand firm to the end will be saved. Here are some practical guidelines while living in this end times.

Firstly, we need to be faithful in what we do. In the days before Connecticut became a state in the 17th century, 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. Let’s bring candles to be brought in so 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 soon. 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.

Secondly, we have to love one another. In the time of troubles, we want to preserve ourselves. So we become very selfish. That is why Jesus’ command, “Love one another” becomes very important in this end times. In time of the early church, there were many plagues. At the first onset of the disease, the unbelievers pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead. If the non-Christian response to the plague was characterized by self-protection, self-preservation, and avoiding the sick at all costs, the Christian response was the opposite. One historian wrote of how “the best” among them honorably served the sick until they themselves caught the disease and died: Most of Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. In spite of the danger, they took charge of the sick, ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life peacefully happy, for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. This unselfish love was the greatest evangelical tool for the spread of the gospel.

Big Idea: Instead of giving into fear, we should preach the gospel