

The Gospel Must First Be Preached
Mark 13:1-23
Key Verse: 13:10

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

We live in a world bombarded by information daily. An ordinary person in the 21st century knows more about world events than presidents or kings did 50 years ago. This can be overwhelming. What does it all mean? What does it have to do with me? We need a framework for understanding. This framework must be based on universal truths and encompass a broad perspective. It must express the underlying principle and direction of world history. Where can we find such a thing? In today's passage Jesus teaches his disciples about the end of the age. He tells them what to watch out for and how to see what is happening in the world. He gives them the “big picture” of what God is doing. When we hold this teaching in our hearts, it will be like a morning star that illuminates our way, even in times of worldwide confusion and uncertainty. May the Lord guide us today through his words, both as a body of Christ, and as individuals, by the help of his Holy Spirit.

I. “Not one stone will be left on another” (1-4)

As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” We can understand this disciple. The Jerusalem Temple, built by Herod over a period of 46 years (Jn 2:20), was a marvel to behold. It sat on the highest point in Jerusalem and occupied one-sixth 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. It was covered with a large golden dome. When the sun shone on the temple, the dazzling reflection captured the mind's eye of any observer. To the disciples, who were mostly country boys from Galilee, it was fascinating and most impressive. One of them just about lost control of himself as he exclaimed before Jesus how magnificent it was. Maybe he expected Jesus to say “Amen,” and join him in admiring the materials and architecture and magnificence of the temple.

How did Jesus respond? 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.” I don't believe that Jesus was happy with this disciple. Jesus had just taught them not to be impressed by rich leaders in flowing robes throwing bundles of money into the treasury. Instead, they should see one poor widow offering two small coins as the most amazing thing, for she honored God from her heart. Yet right away, one of his disciples began praising the glittering temple building. So Jesus told him plainly that the temple would be completely destroyed—nothing would be left. This was literally fulfilled when the Roman General Titus invaded Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and destroyed it completely. More than one million people were killed. The rest were dragged away into captivity as slaves. It was the end of the Jewish nation politically for nearly 2,000 years. This awful event was God's wrath against those who rejected his Son (Mk 12:9). Rather than seeing the glitter of the temple, Jesus wanted his disciples to see that the judgment of God was coming upon his people. Jesus' disciples seem to have been shocked. They thought the temple was God's house that could never be destroyed; if it was destroyed, that was the end of the age. Perhaps they traveled on, in stunned silence, from the temple to the Mount of Olives.

In our time, many are fascinated by internet communications and technology. Some people seem to live in a virtual world as though it were the real world. In one television commercial, a saavy internet guru is pleased with himself for creating an avatar, which is a virtual imitation of himself, living in a virtual world on his own virtual island. As he explains what he is doing with great enthusiasm, his boss simply asks him if he is earning virtual money or real money, suggesting that only by earning real money can he buy real food and really survive. Many people are consumed by the internet. Yet, the internet can disappear in an instant. Last week, some underwater internet cables were cut. Suddenly, many large cities were completely shut down. Jesus tells us plainly that the things of the world will all perish and fade away. We must not be fascinated by such things. We must know that God's judgment will surely come upon all the godlessness of men.

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 all about to be fulfilled?’” We should give the disciples some credit here. They believed that what Jesus said would happen, though it was incredible. They also perceived that Jesus was referring to something beyond the destruction

of the temple—that is, the end of the age. So they asked for a timetable and a sign. Jesus did not answer the first question. Jesus answered the second question later. Before giving an answer, Jesus taught them what was really important for them to know about the end of the age.

II. Two warnings and a great hope (5-8).

First, watch out that no one deceives you (5-6). 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.’” Jesus was concerned about his disciples’ vulnerability to the things of the world. The problem is that behind these things lurks a deceiver. He is Satan. Satan works hard to raise false saviors. These false saviors promise security and happiness, but it is a deception. They lead people away from God, to eternal destruction.

These days many people follow the Dalai Lama as though he is the way to truth and salvation, including actors Steven Segal and Richard Gere. In 2001, a Christian professor, James A. Beverly, interviewed the Dalai Lama on behalf of Christianity Today and reported the results in an article titled, “Hollywood Idol.” Beverly found Dalai Lama charismatic, engaging and interesting. Yet, as we would expect, Dalai Lama could not deal with the truth about Jesus Christ. On the one hand, he admired Jesus as one of the great leaders and teachers, a truly enlightened one. But he could not accept Jesus’ teaching about God, or that Jesus is the Son of God. When asked to reconcile his high view of Jesus with Jesus’ own words, he said that Jesus reincarnated, and as he reincarnated he changed his teaching. When asked if that made Jesus a liar, he claimed that it was okay to change the message to fit the audience and it was not lying because Jesus’ motive was to help people. This past Christmas season, I was at the YMCA to exercise. On the whiteboard in the entryway there was a quote about peace and joy, not from Jesus Christ, but from Dalai Lama. When I inquired as to who put it there, it was the shift supervisor. She graduated from Marquette, a Catholic University, where she studied deeply about Buddhism. I was shocked. I learned that the influence of Buddhist teaching and the Dalai Lama is more widespread than most of us may realize. Some time ago, a Buddhist monk led the morning prayer in the U.S. Senate, which only Christians had done in the past. Dr. Marvin Newell, a Christian professor of intercultural studies, who spoke to us during our Friday leaders’ meeting several months ago, said that in America today Buddhism is a greater threat to truth than is Islam.

Jesus warns us to watch out for false saviors. These may be other people, or they may be human ideas, such as materialism or hedonism. These days most people want to just get along with everyone else for the sake of future security. Anyone who claims to know the absolute truth will be coerced to accept others’ contrary ideas as of equal credibility. In this atmosphere, many pander to false saviors. Jesus tells us to watch out for them and cling to our true Savior, Jesus Christ. This was Jesus’ first concern.

Second, do not be alarmed (7). Jesus said, “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.” We hear a lot of bad news every day about wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Chad. There is so much bad news reported by the media. Someone said we should call the 5:00 news, the 5:00 bad news—“And now, for the 5:00 bad news.” But to Jesus the problem is not that there is a lot of bad news. The problem is how we react to it. Satan wants to use the bad news to make us alarmed, that is, to make us fearful. If he can make us fearful, he can capture us. Satan is like a spider which poisons its prey with venom, paralyzes it, and then binds it with webs. We must be very alert to the spirit of fear that tries to come into our hearts through bad news. We must cry out for the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit drives out the spirit of fear with the love of God. The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God’s children. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us we can cry out, “Abba, Father,” in full trust in God and have a great assurance of his love.

Last winter I visited the Middle East to attend the UBF Director’s Conference. I was moved by the testimony of Missionary Studd Cho from Lebanon. When the war broke out between Israel and Hezbollah, he was in great danger. He sent his wife and children to Korea, but he had to stay in Lebanon. He experienced more than 100 bombs dropping around him. At first, he was paralyzed by fear and could not get up from his bed. But coworkers around the world were praying for him. Then the Holy Spirit visited him and set him free from fear. He got up and went out and had one-to-one Bible study with a Muslim student. This student accepted the gospel and became a disciple of Jesus Christ. Later this student moved to a Muslim country to cowork with UBF missionaries there. Praise God! Jesus promises us in verse 7 that the world will not end by man’s hand, not even by nuclear bombs. The world is in God’s hand and it will not end until God brings it to an end. Therefore, we do not need to be alarmed by wars and

rumors of wars.

Third, have living hope of the kingdom of God (8). Jesus said in verse 8, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.” In addition to wars, there are many natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, and famines. These are painful and tragic. But we must not fall into despondency and inaction. Jesus said that we must see them as the beginning of birth pains. When birth pains begin a woman and man prepare for action, that is, going to the hospital at any moment. When we hear of wars and disasters we must realize that the kingdom of God is coming. 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 and perfect harmony with God. We Christians should be different in how we view natural disasters and catastrophes. While others fall into despair, we should be full of hope in the coming kingdom of God and ready for action.

III. See what God is doing and participate in it (9-13)

In this part Jesus helps his disciples see the overall picture from God’s point of view. Jesus gives further warnings and guides us to what we must do in this troubled world. Look at verse 9a. “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues.” Jesus again warns them to be on guard. It is because persecution is coming. This persecution will come through religious leaders and institutions. It is designed to make God’s people seem like ungodly people and to make ungodly people seem like godly people. Many of us have read the book, “The Heavenly Man,” by Brother Yoon. He suffered much from persecution by the Chinese government. But when he came to America, he experienced a different kind of persecution that really shocked him. It was psychological persecution and it came from other Christians. To see properly through this kind of persecution, we must remember Jesus’ words and use discernment. In listening to media reports against Christians, we must be very careful. The devil uses every opportunity to destroy churches and reputations. We must be on our guard and discern who the real enemy is.

However, we must also know that God uses persecution. Look at verse 9b. “On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.” Persecution comes because of Jesus. It is not really a personal matter against his people; they are involved in the global conflict between Jesus and the devil. They are persecuted on account of Jesus. Jesus uses this persecution to give them an audience with governors and kings. Jesus wants them to be his witnesses. Jesus himself set the example. When he was tried before the Sanhedrin, he proclaimed that he is the Son of God who would come in power and great glory to establish the kingdom of God (Mk 14:62). When Jesus was tried before Pilate, he proclaimed the kingdom of God to Pilate (Jn 18:36). Even from the cross, Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, saved a condemned man, and took him to paradise with him (Lk 23:43). Later, Paul followed Jesus’ example. When he was in prison for his faith in Christ, he came before governors Felix and Festus, and King Agrippa, and perhaps Caesar himself. Paul used these opportunities to testify about Jesus (Ac 24:21; 26:23,27). Paul’s message and spirit were so powerful that the worldly leaders felt they were on trial before Paul. They told Paul to be quiet and tried to change the subject. Obviously they were convicted by what he said. Paul also preached the gospel to the Roman soldiers who guarded him, and some of them became Christians. We learn here that through persecution God opens the way to witness about Jesus. We must be on our guard, and be ready to preach the gospel.

Look at verse 10. “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” Here Jesus tells us what God is doing in this troubled world. God has a plan. It is to preach the gospel to all nations. The world cannot end until God has fulfilled his plan. At the time Jesus spoke, the gospel had not gone into all nations. But now it has spread widely throughout the world. This has led many to think that the end may come in the near future. 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 they think it is more urgent. In UBF we pray to send 100,000 missionaries to all nations by the year 2041. We must know that God is serious about spreading the gospel to all nations. This is God’s plan and purpose and passion.

The gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ. It is the good news that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Through Jesus, God saves people from sin and death and the devil and gives eternal life in his kingdom. Through Jesus, God restores paradise to

mankind, where he reigns forever in perfect peace and love. To spread this good news of the gospel, God is always at work. Through natural disasters, wars, and persecutions, God is working for good, to appeal to men to believe on his Son and be saved. In the aftermath of the dreadful tsunami in Southeast Asia a couple of years ago, God worked for good to make Jesus known. As relief goods poured in from Christian agencies around the world, many Muslim and Buddhist people realized the love of God and opened their hearts to Christ. We in UBF participated in this relief effort by sending our Christmas offering. When the tragic massacre took place at Virginia Tech, Samaritan's Purse sent rapid response teams to counsel students. Out of that awful tragedy, there were some students who accepted the gospel and found salvation in Christ. We offered up sincere prayers for their campus. So many UBF missionaries have gone to many nations of the world to fulfill God's plan to preach the gospel to all nations. In the midst of any kind of problem or turmoil, we must know that God is using all things to preach the gospel. We must see God's plan and find out how he wants us to participate in it.

How? Look at verse 11. "Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." Jesus promises to give us the Holy Spirit to help us. The Holy Spirit loves to talk about Jesus. The Holy Spirit loves to bring the good news of salvation to lost sinners. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of power and love and self-discipline. The Holy Spirit enables any kind of weak person to testify boldly about Jesus in accordance with God's will.

Look at verses 12-13. The persecution gets worse. Beloved family members are so sharply divided on the issue of Jesus that those who don't believe begin to hate those who believe. The closest human relationships become the means for Satan's most painful attacks. Anti-Christian brothers betray their Christian siblings to death. Anti-Christian parents hand their Christian children over to be tortured. Anti-Christian children rebel against their Christian parents and even want to put them to death. When this happens, the whole world seems to turn against Jesus' people. Jesus said that all men will hate them because they bear Jesus' name. But Jesus promises: "...but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." We may suffer painful persecution. But when we stand firm to the end we have salvation and final victory. This is Jesus' promise.

IV. The sign of the end of the age (14-23).

The sign of the end of the age is the abomination that causes desolation. This is something deliberately and terribly offensive to God that mocks his holiness and righteousness and power. This happened when God's name and presence was profaned in his holy temple. Those who do this invite Satan to reign over them. This brings complete desolation. Jesus warns his people to flee the impending judgment of God. To be ready to flee, they should not be too attached to the things of the world. Jesus urges us to pray during such times. Jesus comforts us with the promise that God cuts short the days of distress for the sake of his people. We can see the abomination that causes desolation in the United States in the removal of prayer from public schools, in the heinous practice of legalized abortion, and in the approval of gay marriages. I believe that the only hope for America at this time is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Only the gospel can change the hearts of people and turn them from darkness to light. Only the gospel can bring a lasting solution to our root problems. Let's make a new decision to preach the gospel as of first importance, especially on our campuses.