

PREACH THE GOSPEL IN THIS TROUBLED WORLD

Mark 13:1-37

Key Verse: 13:10

"And the gospel must first be preached to all nations."

Chapter 13 describes many signs of the end of the age. Here the phrase, "the end of the age," has a bad connotation. It implies that the world is so sick and evil that it cannot stand anymore. At the end of the age, the world is ruled by anti-Christians. At the end of the age, Christians will receive much persecution. But in this chapter, Jesus commands us to fight against the evil world spiritually. Jesus also commands us to witness to others by standing firm in the faith. In short, Jesus does not want his people to be negative or to compromise with the world. Jesus wants us to preach the gospel to all nations in the midst of persecutions and hardships through one-to-one Bible study. In this way, God's people should be willing to obey God's will for world salvation. God's people should not give up on the lost people or on the lost world. Why is it so? It is because Jesus will come again in power and glory as he promised. It is because God's promise will be fulfilled. Verse 31 says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." As was promised, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will take place. Our faith in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ should be engraved in our hearts, and this expectation must make us rejoice every day. May God teach us what we should do when the times are so full of signs of the end of the age.

I. Watch out that no one deceives you (1-13)

First, the disciples were fascinated by the temple stones (1-4). Jesus and his disciples had just come out of the temple and were going to the Mount of Olives, which was situated in full view of the temple. One disciple exclaimed, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (1) The dusty disciples became ebullient to look at the beauty of the massive stones of the temple buildings. Maybe some of them wanted to approach the stones of the temple building and kiss them, not one time, but many times. The disciples were

susceptible to the glittering things of the world, like some of us. Admittedly, their hearts had already been impressed by the elegant and pompous high priests' garments. Surely, James and John looked at their own rugged clothes once, and then they looked at the high priests' garments three or four times. Then they lost control because of their inferiority complex. Now they saw the massive stones of the buildings, which were covered all over with plates of gold of great weight. Again, they were overwhelmed by the glittering things of the world, especially by the massive stones of the temple buildings. Suddenly, their desire to grab the glittering things of the world arose. So some shouted, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (1) Indeed, the temple buildings were magnificent, representing the culture and civilization of the day.

How did Jesus answer them? 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.'" This was a prediction of the imminent doom of Herod's temple in Jerusalem. In 70 A.D. the original temple was gone. In 70 A.D. Jerusalem fell to the besieging army of Titus. He desecrated the temple and demolished it completely until not one stone was left on another, in order to take out the plated gold in between the stones.

Jesus' prophecy concerning the temple building was also an allegory about the destiny of human civilization, which dazzles the human mind but the resources of which are nothing but stones--the dust of the ground. Nevertheless, men, as incorrigible sinners, have indomitable desires to possess the things of the world in their hands.

What was the response of the disciples? Peter, James, and John, the top three disciples, and Andrew, were greatly surprised at Jesus' words. Their surprise was twofold. One was their understanding of human culture. The other was their lack of a sense of history. Anyway, their surprise was to end all their surprises. One of them came and asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" (4) To Jesus, the disciples were future leaders through whom the world should be changed and world history set on the right track. The disciples had no insight to see world history and its culture.

Second, watch out not to be deceived (5-8). In this part, Jesus tells them the general overview of the end of the age and its signs. There will be many false prophets and false Christs (6). There will be many rumors of wars (7). Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines (8). When man abandoned God the world was not getting better. The world was full of bad news overflowing. Rumor begets rumor. Fear begets fear. Distress begets distress. A nation is ready to destroy another nation. Jesus tells them that such things will happen continuously. But the disciples should not be deceived by the phenomena of the world. They must think this is nothing but birth pains of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (8). Jesus did not see the troubled world as the signs of utter destruction of the world. Jesus saw it as a sign that world salvation work is pregnant and in birth pains.

Third, anti-Christians persecute God's people (9-13). Jesus told them that they will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of Jesus they would stand before governors and kings (9). In other words, they will receive intensive persecutions. It was the darkest time in history when Jesus came into this world. When the true light came, the darkness did not accept it. When the light shines, the darkness is dispelled. Therefore, the power of darkness is extremely disturbed. By extinguishing the true Light (Jn 1:7,9), evil men persecuted God's people beyond measure. What did Jesus say to them? Jesus said in verse 9a, "You must be on your guard." Jesus did not sympathize with his people. He told them to prepare themselves to defeat 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 dismissed. If anyone claimed his name he became a martyr. Witnessing his name to anti-Christians was possible only through martyrdom. At the end of the 17th century, Christian faith was planted in the hearts of 8,000 Korean people. Rich people accepted Jesus. It was because they had everything, but they were very fatalistic because of upcoming death. They heard there is eternal salvation in Jesus. So around 3,000 rich people who had everything but were slaves of

death accepted eternal salvation in Jesus and died rejoicing. There were high-class people, noble-class people, ordinary-class people and servant- and slave-class people. They heard the good news of great joy that in Jesus all men are equal. At that time, 75% of the population were servants and government slaves. If anyone committed a crime, he became a permanent government slave, together with his family members and relatives. When they heard the good news of great joy that all men are made equally in God, they were happy to die. So 8,000 Catholic Christians were martyred by the sword. Nobody was swayed.

There are also betrayals. Look at verses 12-13. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." The characteristics of the end of the age are a rebellious mind and disobedience. In their rebellion, brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. However, the most characteristic action will be that all men will hate God's people because of Jesus. They hate a lukewarm Christian a little bit. They hate all the devoted Christians intensively. But Jesus commands Christians to stand firm to the end, not only so they may be saved, but also so they may influence anti-Christians to surrender themselves to God and his absolute words.

Fourth, God's people must teach the Bible to all people of all nations (10). Look at verse 10. "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." Jesus knew that the world was full of anti-Christians and ungodly people, and that Bible-believing people are like a handful of mountain goats. Reality is reality. When we see the world, ungodly people have no sense of shame. Rather, they are proudly boasting about their sins, squarely and boldly. The trend of the world is to condone ungodly men to the maximum degree. For example, an anti-Christian organization called "CAN" kidnapped a newly married couple who were on their way to the wife's house. A crime took place. The agents of CAN, deprogrammers, hired by the bride's ungodly brother, kidnapped the bride. The bridegroom went to the nearest police station and tried to report the crime. But the police, who were tempered by CAN people, completely ignored his report.

They did not make a police report. How can we evangelize the world? One must start from himself. It is possible when one person has absolute faith in Jesus who said, "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." In this troubled world, where abominable people make the world sicker and sicker, everybody despairs. But Bible-believing Christians should not be deceived by the devil or those greedy for the things of the world. We must preach the gospel, obeying our Lord Jesus' command, "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." The result of preaching the gospel through one-to-one Bible study will be remarkable in the long run. It will bear fruit, as God's one-to-one Bible study with Abraham has filled the world with his descendants. It will bear fruit, as Jesus' one-to-one Bible study with anyone whenever time was available has brought forth world conquest with the gospel of Jesus. When we preach the gospel, we must preach that we have eternal salvation only in Jesus and we have a living hope in the glorious kingdom of God. The word of Jesus is indeed glorious. It is the word of God from above. In this troubled world, from time to time we don't know what we should do. When we look at the world, it resembles the immorality and violence of Sodom and Gomorrah. We feel no strength in our bodies. But Jesus tells us that we should overcome the world and preach the gospel as of first importance.

II. Abominable people cause desolation to the world (14-23)

Abominable people cause people fear and distress. Here abominable people are those who invert the order of the universe made by God and those who suppress the truth of God. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) emphasized "superman." He claimed that man can do without God. But he was not a superman. He died of venereal diseases because he could not even control his emotional feelings and sinful desires. He said, "God is dead." But God was not dead. Nietzsche was dead because of his sins. His bad influence was overpowering to sinful people. His influence made people go astray and commit uncountable suicides due to their fatalism after becoming Nietzsche's students. Nietzsche was indeed an abominable one in the sight of God.

Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) is also an abominable person. In order to rise to power, expelling the Tsarists, he adopted false propaganda and terrorism as

the principle of his politics. He raised many ruthless disciples. Among them, Josef Stalin was his best student; he killed 10,000,000 husband candidates in Russia. Most of all, he made Russian women sorrowful with no hope of a dream of marriage. Charles Peirce (1839-1914) is a small abominable one. As we know well, this country was established with gospel faith. As a result, there were so many people who had the spirit of giving on the basis that God gave his one and only Son Jesus as our Savior. But Charles Peirce imported utilitarianism and revised it into pragmatism. His principle is the role of chance. In other words, if there is a chance, please do not miss it, but get it. His idea was accepted by sinful people. Because of his bad influence gospel faith is gone and selfishness has become the norm of this country. Those who live under the influence of abominable people are mostly selfish and distressed. They are slaves of material possessions. They are slaves of fear. They always worry about groceries in the refrigerator. They worry about some disaster taking place today or tomorrow (15-17). As a result, there is no peace of God in their hearts.

Those who lived under the influence of abominable people will be put into distress and trouble unequalled from the beginning. Look at verses 18-20. "Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them."

Abominable people do not repent. They disguise themselves as false prophets and false Christs. Look at verses 21-22. "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." Abominable people are the agents of the devil. They do their best to devour God's people. They even have power to perform miracles and do witchcraft and deceive people to lead them astray. In 1992, there were around 100,000 false prophets among hypocritical Christians in many countries. They assured their followers that Jesus would come October 28, 1992, at 9:00 p.m. They emptied poor and ignorant Christians' pockets during four years' time. But Jesus did not come on that day. It is surprising that

there are so many abominable people among cultural Christians. We can discern who abominable people or their followers are. They are those who do not study the Bible or obey the teachings of the Bible.

III. Men will see the Son of Man coming (24-37)

First, Jesus comes again (24-31). Jesus' coming again is the most joyful promise of God among so many promises of God. It is because the Second Coming of Jesus is tightly connected with his first coming to this world. When Jesus came to this world, he came to save men from their sins. Jesus laid the foundation of work of eternal salvation. Right before his ascension, Jesus gave the great commission to evangelize the whole world. Matthew 28:18-20 says, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" At that time the disciples were like orphans. But what a glorious promise it was for them!

Jesus' people have waited for the Second Coming of Jesus and this has helped them to keep up their lives of faith. Waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ has been the power source of the early Christians as well as of all Bible-believing Christians. While waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus, they preached the good news of great joy that there is eternal salvation and a living hope in the kingdom of God. But Bible-believing Christians are vulnerable to the attack of the devil. Many people of the world think money is the most precious thing. Some people think that pleasure or an easy-going way of life is the best way to live in this world. In short, it is not easy for Bible-believing Christians to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. It is not easy to wait eagerly for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when he will judge the living and the dead. We must examine ourselves to see if we have the secret of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in our hearts.

Evil men rejected the Son of Man and crucified him on the cross. They thought that they won the victory and they would see him no more. But look at

verse 26. "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." When he comes again in his great power and glory, evil men can run away, but there is no hiding place. Whether they want to or not, they have to see with their own eyes the Son of Man, whom they crucified. What a surprising event it will be! That's what they had never expected. Once they saw Jesus on the cross shedding his blood for the sin of the world, and ridiculed him (Mk 15:29,30). But now they have to see with their own eyes Jesus who comes with great glory and power as the Judge.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 supports the Second Coming of Christ: "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."

There are many people living in this cursed world who take the word of God Almighty lightly. They are greatly mistaken. Verse 31 says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." There are alpha and omega. Someday heaven will disappear and the earth will pass away. But the word of God never passes away because it is the word of God. Everything will be fulfilled according to the word of God. Therefore we must learn from the fig tree the lesson that the word of God never passes away. There are many lessons we have to learn. But this is one lesson we should learn without fail. Look at verses 28-29. "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door."

Second, nobody knows the day of Jesus' coming again (32-37). Since an angel told Jesus' disciples in Acts 1:11, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven," the theology of eschatology has been in the hearts of Bible-believing Christians. But

these days, there are many who deny the Second Coming of Jesus. It is because for the last 2000 years, people waited and waited and Jesus did not come again. Those who become party animals in their mentality deny the theology of eschatology. One young man said, "Last night, I sinned greatly against God. But I am okay." This kind of person has no fear of God and his promise that Jesus will come again to judge.

2 Peter 1:3 says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." The word of God is very clear about God's promises. But fallen men wantonly reject God's promise, especially the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are like the people in 2 Peter 3:3. "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires." Look at verse 32. "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." If we knew the day of his coming, we would calculate. Jesus did not teach us when he comes again so that we may not calculate.

In this passage we learn that we must see that God's people are shepherds of the lost people. In spite of their rebelliousness and persecution, we must teach them the Bible through one-to-one Bible study until they believe the Second Coming of Jesus as God's promise. In this chaotic world, it is easy for anybody to despair or to worry for nothing. But we must teach the Bible as of first importance. Then God will surely raise 10,000 Bible-believing Christians in the United States. This hope is Jesus' hope and the only hope for this nation.