

Temple Destruction Foretold, Part 1.
Mark 13: 1-13

Matthew 5:1-16

Psalm 23

Responsive Psalm 27 1-10

Last week we finished up the 12th chapter of the book of Mark, which closed out Jesus' public preaching ministry. The 12th chapter was a rapid fire of accounts of Jesus' run ins with the different groups from the Sanhedrin while in Jerusalem and covered different topics but they mainly came down to Jesus' messiah ship, and authority. This week we are going to be starting out in chapter 13, which as Aaron put it is Mark's apocalyptic writing. So that being said, we already know before we even jump into this that it is likely going to be a controversial subject with a few differing views over the meaning, and timing of these events that Jesus mentions here. So knowing that, lets us start up this morning by reading starting from verse 1, and we will be reading verse 13. Which breaks this section down, because verse 14 continues directly from 13 but we are only going to be looking at the first 13 verses today.

So we catch up with Jesus and his disciples here as they are leaving the temple, after all of the discourses that happened throughout chapter 12. This is the last time that Jesus will go to the temple to preach, so in essence his leaving the temple here as a larger importance than just the physical act of leaving the premise. He has come, he has judged, he has warned and now he is leaving. At this point in Jesus' ministry, 3 times now, he has foretold of his coming death, by the hands of the Jewish and Gentile leaders here in Jerusalem. He came to the temple, through out the merchants and money changers, establishing his authority over the temple practices over that of the Sanhedrin. And he has also bested all 3 groups of the Sanhedrin in doctrinal debate over the scriptures furthering establishing his authority and messiah ship. In chapter 11, we see that Jesus has judged the temple, as a den of thieves and the account of the withering fig tree symbolizing the temple, which appears that it should be bearing fruit but is found lacking.

As we know it was Jesus' practice that when he would enter into a city he would go to the temple and teach, that was chapter 11 and 12, and now in chapter 13 he is leaving the temple for good. This temple has become like the fig tree, and Jesus will no longer be associated with it. Verse 1, Jesus leaves the temple, never to return. This has interesting implications if we think about it for a minute. The temple has been corrupted, it no longer serves any purpose in God's plan, for the Messiah has come, one greater than David, one greater than the Temple, the one whom all of these things that were established were done so to point to him. Now that he has come, the temple, and all of its practices, traditions, laws, rituals are unnecessary. So if the temple is unnecessary, if we see here that Jesus has judged it so, and he himself has left it, and foretells of its destruction. Then I ask the question..does it even make sense to think that it will be rebuilt and the temple practices will be reestablished?

Even if it is, is this something that Christians should desire? I think not, for now that the Messiah has come, the fulfillment of all of these things, there is no longer a need for the shadows, for the things that foretold of his coming. In fact, promoting the idea that the temple needs to be rebuilt, and the old laws, and traditions reestablished is a denial of Christ isn't it? What he did on the cross, was that not good enough for our justification, and sanctification, do we really need to reestablish the sacrifices and offerings? I find that idea offensive, and frankly, as the apostle John put it, the spirit of anti-Christ.

So I think we Christians need to be smarter than that, some tend to get tied into the geopolitical nonsense in Israel, and Palestine wanting to make sure that Israel remains a sovereign nation, and that the holy land remains intact with the belief that the temple will be rebuilt. That I think is putting more emphasis on the temple than what is healthy for someone who is relying on Jesus' blood as a propitiatory sacrifice.

In the following verse we see that even one of the disciples is caught up in the splendor of the temple, its size, and its beauty. Mark here does not name who this disciple is, and it is only speculation but it is believed that it was likely Judas, and I think that this idea does make sense because of what we know of Judas is that he was drawn to riches and material things. Another reason why it is believed that it is likely this comment was made by Judas and his name was omitted due to the infamy of his betrayal. In Jesus' day, the temple had been under construction for over 50 years, and it was a grand marvel being the largest temple ever constructed in the ancient world, and here, having not even been complete yet, Jesus predicts its destruction. To get an idea of this grand construction, and how impossible it would seem the idea that it would actually be destroyed it is helpful to know a little about the construction of this temple itself. When I picture it in my mind, I think of something like maybe a football stadium, having many levels, and sections with the main section being central. But reading about this construction of this temple that was being built by Herod I realize that my idea of what the temple was pales in comparison to reality. Herod had enlarged Solomon's temple that was already there, making it measure a total of 325 meters wide, by 500 meters long, giving it a circumference of almost a full mile!

This was roughly a 35 acre enclosure that could have fit 12 football fields inside. At the southwest corner there was a retaining wall that was about 15 stories above ground and it sloped downward to the Kidron Valley. The historian Josephus wrote that the stones used in the construction were enormous, some of them were measured approx 60' in length. Now as we know in AD 70, the temple was destroyed, torn down and there has not been found any stones of this size in any archeological sites, but there have been stones found on the north end that measure 42' long, 11' high, and 14' deep weighing in at over a million pounds...and this was just the retaining wall around the temple. Above this retaining wall, was the Royal Portico which stood 45' wide and consisted of 3 aisles supported by four rows of columns which were crowned with Corinthian capitals and rose to a height of 40' and supported the cedar paneled ceiling above. The thickness of these columns according to Josephus was that it would take 3 men with outstretched arms to wrap around it. In the center of all of this was the sanctuary, which ancient writers noted was shaped like a lion, it was broader in the front, about 50m across, and tapered toward the back measuring 30m across. It rose to a height of 50m and was a collage of gold, silver, crimson, and purple that would sparkle and radiate in the sun.

So it would be no wonder that this temple was strike awe in the disciples as they were there. And it would seem by the sheer size of even some of these blocks that the thought of it being destroyed would seem near impossible at that time. This statement of Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple is just another example of Jesus speaking plainly and no longer using shadows and hints. Previously we saw the account of the fig tree, which was symbolic, a parable about the temple, but here he plainly says, Not one stone of these great buildings will be left upon another. And we know, a mere 40 years later this came true. Caesar ordered the whole city and the temple to be utterly destroyed and torn down to the ground, and the walls surrounding the city were to be completely leveled to the ground so that any future visitors would not even be aware that a wall once stood there.

Jesus judgment of this temple is directed to the perversion of it, it has become like a cancerous tumor, it has ceased its designed function and has been corrupted and has become something entirely different, and because of that it will be destroyed. In verse 3, we see that Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple with some of his disciples. It is from this vantage point that one would be able to get a commanding view of the eastern end of the temple, and it has been said that from the Mount of Olives one could see directly into the entrance of the temple.

When Jesus and his disciples had first arrived in Jerusalem, if you remember they came by this very same way, approaching the city from the Mount of Olives, and now they have left the city just as they have arrived and are sitting at the Mount of Olive's overlooking the temple that Jesus had predicted would be destroyed. And it is here that Peter, James, John and Andrew privately ask Jesus when this destruction would happen, and what would be the signs warning of it. These 4 disciples were the first 4 to be called by Jesus when he was beginning his ministry around the Sea of Galilee, and these same 4 disciples are the ones that he gives his final speech to.

Now this is where this chapter becomes controversial, there are many who believe that this writing of Mark and these words of Jesus are apocalyptic, meaning having to do with the end of the age. Then there are those who believe that all of these things have been fulfilled in AD 70, when the city of Jerusalem, and it's temple was destroyed by the Romans. This chapter is a very hard chapter to understand hence the controversy of the understanding of the timing of it's fulfillment. Was it already fulfilled in AD 70, or is it also speaking to more, a further judgment and time of destruction.

The passage here has wording that would lead one to believing that this is an apocalyptic message, it references the coming of the Son of Man, in reference to the end of time. But it is also lacking what many of the other apocalyptic passages include, which is themes such as, the contrasts between this age, and the age to come, heaven and earth, and those who are belong to the family of God and those who do not. These are 3 themes that are not really touched upon that are present in all other apocalyptic writing. It is a common practice to take this chapter and sort of separate it from the rest of the book, treating it as something that is isolated, and it's own thing but I think in doing so we commit a grave error in an attempt to understand this scripture. One of the first rules of understanding and interpreting scripture, is that scripture interprets scripture. And when we take a section like this one, and isolate it we limit the tools that we have to understand it.

For the past 2 chapters now, Mark has been focusing on Jesus confrontation with the temple in Jerusalem and the religious authority there. There has been a tension building between the established Temple worship, and the authority of Jesus. And as we have seen last week in the ending of chapter 2, we find that the temple, and Jesus stand at opposite ends opposed to each other. So we have this stark divide between Jesus and the temple. And this divide is not something that we can just forget about as we enter into chapter 13, we can not just toss a side 2 chapters of condemnation toward the corrupt temple practices, and look at chapter 13 as an isolated message foretelling the future of the church. No, it is bound in, and together with chapter 11 and 12, and is in fact the culmination of the judgment of Jesus against the corrupt and now useless temple.

Quite simply if we notice the question that the disciples here ask Jesus...they ask him. When will these things be? In the context of the conversation they are talking about the destruction of the temple itself, and not the end of the age. And not only when, but how we will know, what are the signs of the temples destruction. And skipping a head a bit, gives us another clue to help us understand the meaning of this passage, in verse 30 Jesus says, "Assuredly I say to you this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

And we know that it was about 40 years later, that these things did happen. Now all of that being said, could this not also be understood as a foreshadowing? Much like the old testament, Israel, and the temple foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of the Church, of God's people from all nations, tribes and tongues, there are elements here as well that we can apply to the return of the Messiah, at the end of the age later in this chapter.

But we must be careful, not to make this passage to be some sort of test, or measuring stick in an attempt to predict when the end may be, for Jesus warns his disciples here, which Mark records therefor warning his readers as well not to be caught up into reading signs, for the end has not yet come. As followers of Christ, it is not our mission, or our goal and calling to attempt to be some sort of prophet looking for signs and wonders that will point us to when the end has come. But rather we are to be faithful servants, ministering, witnessing, in this present age, with little concern for the next.

As we have seen here in the book of Mark, as well throughout the entire scripture that God's people will suffer persecution, tribulation, hardships, and trials. It is about faithfully enduring through all of them, with our reliance solely upon God. We are to be faithful, not only now, but tomorrow, and the next day, and to continue in faith, until the day of judgment, whether that be upon our individual deaths, when we find ourselves face to face with the Father, or the end of the age.

As we see here in verse 6, often times the problems we face are not even necessarily from the outside, sometimes they arise on the inside, as a part of the church, posing as leaders and prophets, and even posing as the Messiah himself to lead people astray. As we know these are not just sporadic, or isolated occurrences but it is something that we must be constantly wary of, for the church is full of false teachers, and wolves in sheep's clothing who seek to take advantage of the assumed naive nature of those of faith. There are many who may claim to be from God, but we must alert as to how those claims are being used. Does what is being said represent God according to what we read in scripture, or are they merely using God for their own selfish motives. This admonition to be watchful and wary is not enticing us to attempt to read the signs for the end times, but to be faithful, and watchful in the present day.

As we continue the last half of this segment that we are looking at today, as we read it again here, this seems to pretty much describe any age throughout history, and likely the future as well does it not? Verse 7. "But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled for such things must happen but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines, and troubles, these are the beginning of sorrows." All of these things are still going on today aren't they? Verse 9 "But watch for yourselves for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues, you will be brought before the rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them." Also, sounds like what is going on around the world today as well does it not? Verse 10, "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak, but whatever is given you in that hour, speak that for it is not you who speak, but the holy spirit. No brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end shall be saved."

Now all of these things happened leading up to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. In AD 40, there was rumors and fear of war when Roman Emperor Caligula attempted to erect a statue to himself in the Temple at Jerusalem. But it wasn't for another 25 years until war actually broke out in AD 66 when the Zealots revolted and Rome defeated them.

There were earthquakes, in Phrygia in AD 61, and Pompey in AD 63, and ultimately the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. So while all of these things that Jesus talks about here, happened quite literally, we could still say that much of the same types of things are going on around the world today as well. I think the key to understanding this today, at least these first 13 verses is not so much as an apocalyptic way leading to such future persecution

But rather for the present, and the current persecution that God's children always suffer and its all tied into verse 13, "and you will be hated by all for my names sake, but he who endures to the end shall be saved." This is both an answer to the disciples question of when will the temple be destroyed, and an instruction to us to remain faithful through all trials and tribulations. As James Edwards puts it. "the purpose of these litany of woes in these verses is not to lure believers into speculations about the end, but rather to anchor them to watchfulness and faithfulness in the present. All, these things, which culminates in the destruction of Jerusalem referred to in verse 2, are only the beginning of the birth pains. Believers ought not be alarmed, for the end is not yet." The inevitability of persecution should not cause us anxiety and fear but rather assurance of God's presence in the Holy spirit. Verse 11, When they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak, but whatever is given you in that hour, speak that for it is not you who speak but the holy spirit.

Again, as followers of Christ, we are not to be concerned with the future, but rather our faithfulness of the present and trusting God for his provision in all things. God has designed it so, that his word will be taught not only in times of comfort, but also in times of persecution. The bible, and even our modern history is full of people whose stance for God even under the threat of death has become a great witness to others. We see in verse 9 and 10 that the persecution of believers results in the spread of the gospel to all nations, persecution is not a sign of the end, but rather a sign that we should be even more attentive to preaching the word. And I think that is the message, and the key of this whole passage. No matter the circumstance, whether it be wars, or rumor or wars, famines, or earthquakes, persecution, prison, execution, or betrayal or mocking of your own family, be faithful, trust in God, for if we endure to the end, if our faith proves true and we will be saved in the end.