

Not One Stone Left (Mark 13:1-37)

The last time Jesus first entered Jerusalem on what we call Passion Week, He made quite a splash. He was welcomed as the King that He is. It was, quite literally, a coronation celebration as He rode into the city on the foal of a donkey. But the people had no concept of the true nature of His kingdom. Instead of organizing a rebellion against the Roman occupiers, He went after the Jewish establishment. He cleansed the Temple by driving out the merchants and moneychangers. He dominated the Temple with His teaching, and He really went after the intellectual elite, the ruling class. He harshly pronounced seven woes against the scribes and the Pharisees. He said to them:

*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?
(Matthew 23:33)*

Then He closed His diatribe with the following words:

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'BLESSED is HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"
(Matthew 23:37-39)*

Well, if the priestly class, and most of the Sanhedrin wasn't ticked off before, this would certainly seal the deal. They were furious; they had murder in their hearts because they simply were not willing to let Jesus gather them to Himself.

How about you? Are you willing to let Jesus gather you to Himself?

Jesus and His disciples left the city that afternoon, heading back to Bethany where they were staying with friends and that is where we pick up our story this morning.

*Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him,
"Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"
(Mark 13:1)*

Now, if you look at Matthew and Luke, it becomes obvious that the city impressed them all. I suspect that they were walking along the road and looked back as they ascended the flanks of the Mount of Olives. It's not surprising that they were impressed. Jerusalem was a magnificent city. Her Temple might have been the most magnificent edifice in the world.

The second Jerusalem Temple had originally been constructed under the leadership of Zerubbabel after the Jews returned from captivity, but it was a far inferior to the opulence of Solomon's Temple. In 19 B.C., King Herod decided to do something about it, and began a massive reconstruction project. He leveled the hill outside the Temple and filled in the valleys, expanding the base to cover over twice the area of Solomon's Temple. He engaged over 10,000 skilled laborers, and countless unskilled ones. The building was enlarged to an incredible degree. It was made much taller, and the white marble would gleam in the Palestinian sun. Many of the surfaces were sheathed in gold and as the sun rose, you couldn't look at it from the East because the reflection would be blinding. This project was so massive, it was not completed until 63 AD, just 7 years before it was destroyed by the armies of Titus. (That's 82+ years of construction, if you're keeping track.)

Yes, it was a magnificent Temple, but it was a Temple built to man, not God. Herod commissioned the project to magnify his own legacy and those who followed were not at all interested in glorifying God.

Our God is a jealous God. Although He is longsuffering and incredibly patient with us, He will not share His glory with anyone or anything. He would certainly not share His glory with this Temple built to man. Remember the Tower of Babel? Same principle!

The disciples were in awe of the opulence and magnificence of the Temple, but Jesus had to change their perspective. Nothing that man constructs will persevere. Nothing!

*And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."
(Mark 13:2)*

Of course, that prophecy came true in 70 AD. As the city burned, the fire melted the gold that adorned the Temple and it ran down between the stones. The Roman soldiers tore apart the stones to get to the gold. Not one stone remained standing upon another. All that is left today is a huge retaining wall – called the wailing wall.

This revelation must have come as an incredible shock to the disciples and so those who were closest asked Jesus about it.

*Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"
(Mark 13:3-4)*

I can visualize the scene. They stop on their journey to Bethany. Jesus sits down on the side of the road with a panoramic view of the Temple and His inner circle, those He was closest to approach Him to ask the question. Now, there are really three questions implicit in their inquiry. When will the Temple be destroyed? What sign can we look for to let us know when these things will happen? When will the end of the age come? Perhaps we can see this more clearly from Matthew's account:

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)

To answer these questions, Jesus begins what is called His Olivet Discourse. Matthew recounts this discourse in the greatest detail, so I challenge you to read Matthew chapters 24 and 25. There is a lot there, and it's all a prophecy of the future. But here is a caution: prophecy in the Bible is not given so we can write a detailed history ahead of time. It is given so that as events unfold, the faithful can see God working and give Him glory. It's not surprising at all that there are differences of opinion exactly how this prophecy is going to be fulfilled. But with regard to the overall view, Jesus has told us exactly what we need to know.

And to be blunt, it is not an optimistic view at all. In fact, it is quite pessimistic with regard to human history. This world is a perilous place and it is even more perilous for those who are identified with Jesus.

Part of this prophecy has already taken place. Much of the prophecy refers to what we have been going through for two-thousand years. Some of it refers to our future. And some of the things described, I believe, have multiple fulfillments. There is no way I can

get through the whole thing this morning, so I guess you'll have to come back for our evening service at 6:00.

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. (Matthew 24:4-5)

There is lesson #1, right there. "Take heed that no one deceives you." That presupposes the fact that it is possible for people to be deceived. It is exactly why we need to be people of the Book. You need to know what this Bible says and what this Bible means. This is the source of God's truth and being saturated by His truth is the only way you can avoid being deceived. (It's not too late to sign up for the latest Contenders course!).

Many will come in the name of Christ. Many have come in the name of Christ. Think of Jim Jones, and don't drink his cool-aid. Think of Charles Manson; he convinced his followers that he was the incarnation of Christ. Think of Joseph Smith. Think of the many purveyors of today's prosperity doctrine. Just because somebody calls themselves a Christian teacher doesn't mean they are a Christian teacher.

The most chilling thing is that these false teachers will deceive many. Brian McLaren, a leader of the post-modern, Emerging Church movement, for example, believes we can find common ground with Muslims because they believe in Jesus. Well, they do believe in Jesus ... just not the Jesus of the Bible. Their Jesus is not God the Son. Their Jesus did not die; he was taken to heaven like Elijah was. Their Jesus will return to Earth to correct all of us unfortunate Christians who got it wrong and kill all those who refuse to convert to Islam. Their Jesus is going to marry, have kids, die and be buried alongside Mohammed.

Islam is a false, satanic world religion. As of 2010 there were 1.6 billion people deceived by this movement. Brian McLaren is a heretic. Don't be deceived. Joseph Smith is a heretic who has deceived 14 million Mormons living today. Don't be deceived.

Some would say I'm being a bit harsh and dogmatic. I'm certainly not politically correct. But if we believe that Jesus is the only way to God, and that is exactly what He claimed, then we have a duty to pray for those who are trying to get to God in other ways. I grieve for all those people who have been deceived by agents of Satan. We must not hate them; they are prisoners of war – the great spiritual war. They need to know how much the real Jesus loves them. They need to find God's grace and peace through faith in the real Jesus.

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. (Matthew 24:6-8)

With those words, Jesus has eloquently given us a perfectly accurate summary of history in this fallen world. Have you heard of wars and rumors of wars? Boy howdy! It was just a hundred years ago that we fought the war to end all wars. How did that work out for us? Have you heard of famines, pestilences, earthquakes and other natural disasters? Open the newspaper any day of the week! This is the human experience while we wait for Jesus to return: destruction, deception, distress, disaster. It's so common that we're all but desensitized to it until it happens really close to home.

"But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. 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. Now 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. (Mark 13:9-13)

As a Christian, you should expect to be persecuted. We've had an incredibly good run in this nation. What a blessing it is to be able to meet together publically, to have the privilege of professing our faith openly! That's not the way it is for Christians in much of the world. Do not be surprised if our trip down easy street comes to an abrupt end.

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3:12)

Remember what Jesus said?

'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. (John 15:20)

You don't want to invite persecution, or go looking for it, but don't be surprised if it comes your way. Many of you are going through tremendous trials right now. It's the way of the world. What you have to do, Christian, is to keep your eye on the prize.

I really like the way Pastor Dan at Mayer Community Church put it a few weeks back: Suffering is the end of the world. If you want to see Jesus come back, you need to be ready to suffer. It's okay because ...

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, (Matthew 5:11-12)

If you are called to suffer for Jesus, it will be for a testimony to others. Yes, I know some of you are suffering right now. You may not realize it, but your suffering can be used as a testimony to the truth of Jesus. Even to rulers and kings. The gospel will not be defeated. Satan cannot prevail against the Church; Jesus said so. Don't worry about it. If you belong to Jesus Christ, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you yield to Him, He will let you know exactly what to say at exactly the right time.

Persecution is going to get worse. Your friends might turn against you. Even the members of your own family might betray you. That's not a lot of fun.

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. (Mark 13:13)

I don't know about you, but I would rather have folks like me. I don't want people to hate me, but if I have to make the choice, I'd much rather have people hate me than have God hate me.

I need to make sure you understand the very last sentence in verse 13. This is really important.

But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Mark 13:13)

Please understand; this is an observation, not a prescription. You are not saved by enduring to the end. You will endure to the end because you are saved. If you truly

belong to Jesus, He will make sure you make it through anything the devil throws your way.

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (John 10:28-29)

If Jesus has you, He's not going to lose you. Christian, you need to understand that the world as it exists today will not endure. If you hitch your wagon to the stuff and junk of this world, you're in a world of hurt.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

There will not be one stone left standing on another.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10)

The disciples were seriously impressed with Jerusalem and her Temple. Jesus' message to them was "Hey, it's not going to last." This world's not going to last either. You need to make sure that your hope is firmly grounded in the next world ... the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells.

How do you do that? It's really simple: Believe in Jesus and you'll never face the second death. As an act of faith, an act of your will, confess Him as Lord and believe God has raised Him from the dead. Satan will have nothing in you, and you will be one of those described by our opening scripture:

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Revelation 12:11)