

“APPROACHING THE END WITH CONFIDENT TRUST ”

The 26th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 13:1-13

November 17, 2024

My Dear Friends in Christ:

In our gospel, Jesus finished preaching and teaching in the temple. He'll never visit it again. As He leaves for the last time before his death on the cross, one of His disciples points out the beauty and majesty of the buildings on the temple grounds as well the new construction in the temple area. Jesus replied that the day would come when the temple would be destroyed and ***not one stone would be left on another.*** The fulfillment of His prophecy came in 70 A.D. when the Roman army laid waste to Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.

Herod the Great started rebuilding Solomon's temple several years before Jesus was born. It ended up being about an 80-year project.

In fact, every time Jesus entered the temple - from the day Mary and Joseph brought Him as a newborn to the temple until this very day when Jesus is talking with his disciples about the magnificent beauty of the temple, there had always been ongoing construction. In fact, the job was completed less than 10 years before the Romans destroyed it again!

The temple had a long history that stretched back to Mount Sinai and the instructions God gave Moses for the tabernacle—the portable temple/tent that served as a place of God's presence in the wilderness wandering of Israel. The tabernacle and later Solomon's temple were the physical center of the Old Testament people of God.

It was the place of sacrifice. **The sacrifices reminded God's people of their sin** - that they were constantly offending God with their thoughts, words, and deeds. **The sacrifices also reminded them of their Savior** - the Savior who would one day come and rescue them from their sin.

As we look at the temple in view of the life of Jesus, we see that the temple and its ceremonial law were really only shadows that pointed forward to the reality of Jesus Christ.

Jesus with His **holy life**, His **innocent suffering and death**, His **resurrection**, and His **ascension** were the perfect fulfillment of the promises set forth in the teachings and ceremonies of the temple.

This means that the temple's purpose was almost over. A few days after today's Gospel, the sky would grow dark as the Son of God hung suspended on a cross. He would **shout in victory, "It is finished!"** and then, **He would die, the earth would shake, and the curtain in the temple would be torn in two.** Then the purpose of the temple would be over.

When we understand that the purpose of the temple would soon be over, we can understand why Jesus was more concerned for **His church** than for His temple.

When the disciples asked about the future of the temple, Jesus talked about the future of the church. They asked, ***"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"***

Instead of responding with information about the temple, Jesus warned them about their own future: ***"See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray."*** Jesus' words have been true for every generation from that day until now. Many would come and still come claiming to be the Messiah but only lead astray.

We seen plenty of "would be" Messiahs in our lifetime.

- Rev. Moon, who died about 12 years ago, had his "Moonies" convinced of his claims to be the Messiah.
- 46 years ago, Jim Jones claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and actually convinced his followers to drink cyanide laced Kool-Aid.
- David Koresh of the Branch Davidians some years ago likewise, claimed to be the Messiah. His movement came to naught 31 years ago.

- The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Christ already returned and set up his millennial kingdom in 1914 and heaven is already filled. Present day followers have to be satisfied to dwell for eternity on this earth.
- The Mormons claim a living prophet as the head of their church. And while not the Messiah, every Mormon male hope to work his way to godhood.
- The late L. Ron Hubbard started the so-called Church of Scientology which unfortunately still thrives today and has been popular among the stars the likes of John Tavalta, Tom Cruise, Pricilla Presley, and the late Kirsty Alley.
- The fringe cults and sects seem to have enough false christ's to go around, but those fringe cults and sects aren't the only fulfillments of Christ's prophecy in today's Gospel.

Even churches that claim to be part of mainline Christianity lead people astray. The tendency for even mainline denominations to abandon the word of God demonstrates the spiritual decay Jesus spoke about in our Gospel. Thus the warning "**See that no one leads you astray.**"

After Jesus warned about the false christs, He warned of **persecutions**. It isn't enough for the false christs to lead people away from the truth, but they will also persecute those who remain faithful!

Jesus warns that people will turn against their own relatives: **"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake."** At another time, Jesus even warned, **"The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God."**

Wow! Suffering, persecution, death... why would anyone want to deal with this? Why not give up and go along with the culture that persecutes us? That's what the recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews were contemplating.

Well, Jesus makes a short simple promise at the end of today's Gospel: **"But the one who endures to the end will be saved,"** that's why we don't give up and give in!

Today's Gospel began with the temporary stones of the temple.

Those stones cannot save, but there **IS** a stone that can save us.

The Psalmist said, ***"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."***

The Temple authorities rejected this stone with intense disfavor. They **arrested** Him and arranged to have Him **beaten** and **crucified**.

- As He hung on the cross, it looked like His end was near.
- As He died on the cross, it looked like His end had come.
- As His cold body lay in the tomb, it looked like His end had passed.

His suffering and death **WAS** an end, but it was not **HIS** end. It was the end of our slavery to sin! It was the end of the condemnation and guilt our sin earned. It was the end of death's reign in this world, because on the Sunday after He was laid in the tomb, He rose from the dead. He rose to live forever.

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

This stone, of course, is Jesus Christ Himself, **the Rock of Ages**. Those who believe in Him, believe in the only stone that lasts forever. They believe in the living stone who is the foundation of the New Heavens and the New Earth. **The one who endures to the end is the one whose faith is in Jesus Christ endures.** The one who believes that Jesus Christ is the only Savior from sin is the one who endures to the end and will be saved.

All things on this earth end. Today's Gospel talks of the beautiful buildings of the temple. If you go to the Holy Land today, you'll find that an Islamic Mosque has replaced it. There will be a day when that mosque will also be gone. Eventually, even the **earth**, the **sun**, the **moon**, and the **stars** will all be gone. Only Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages will remain to preserve us.

Those who followed the false prophets of this world will remain without salvation. Those who endured in the one true faith to the end will be saved. May God grant that for Jesus' sake. Amen.