**The Gospel Must First Be Preached**

Mark 13:1-23 (Key verse 10)

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

In this passage Jesus reveals to the disciples what would exactly happen before his second coming. The disciples had many questions, they were somewhat convinced that Jesus is the messiah who would established God’s kingdom on earth right at that time. However, Jesus reveals to them what should first take place before his second coming. We are in fact living in the times Jesus spoke about and therefore in this passage we are warned on how we should live and the need to have a discerning mind set. There are no coincidences and things are not just happening as part of life. As much as we live in a physical world, it is also a spiritual world. Ultimately, the true believers will be persecuted because of the gospel, they will face difficult times and things will continue to get worse. However, in spite of their sufferings, the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. This is because the gospel is the only hope for the world. The first two verses talk about the destruction of the temple. Then verses 3 through 13 talk about present history. Verses 14 through 23 talk about the future specific tribulation time. It is my prayer that through this message, we may all be encouraged and convicted to preach the gospel as of first priority. Amen!

Look at verse 1, “As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” 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 11.2 meter long, 5.5m wide and 3.7m 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. So to the disciples this was a great magnificence. They were fascinated by the temple building. Besides, in that region the temple was a great land mark. Its beauty and purpose gave the region its meaning and worth. However, 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.” In last weeks passage, you will remember that Jesus had praised the poor woman for given more than all others combined. Jesus had tried to teach the disciples what is really valuable and praise worthy. However, here they were praising the outward appearance of a building. Indeed, as Jesus predicted the temple was destroyed , when the Roman General Titus invaded Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and he destroyed the temple 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). Jesus wanted the disciples to know that God’s judgement was coming. The destruction of the temple was probably shocking news to the disciples. They would have expected the temple to stand till second coming of Jesus.

Just like in the case of the temple, our lives also revolves around things we are so accustomed to. We cannot imagine life without these things. However, as Jesus predicted, that grand monument, the great temple was destroyed in AD 70. This continued to confirm that, whatever the bible is teaching is not some made up stories. The bible is the word of God, and all that it is telling will come true. It is simply a matter of time. We should never treat what the Bible is telling us casually, it is authoritative both to our lives, history and the future. God’s judgment will surely come upon all the godlessness.

Look at verse 3-4, “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” we need to picture this as well, at the mount of Olives is where the is the best view and clear view of the magnificence of the temple. So given Jesus response, they are now even more curious, before they are in clear view of this temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew had questions. When will these things happen? What will be the sign that they are about to be happen? Their question was bigger than the destruction of the temple, they also wanted to know when will God’s kingdom be established. Jesus then begins to give them an answer.

First, **be warned, there will be lies and deceptions.** Look at verse 5-6, “Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.” Jesus is concerned about the true believers. Believers can be very venerable. How do you avoid being deceived or misled? By staying true to the Bible. Now, these people who come along who want to convince you, some of them are even going to be so bold as to call themselves as Christ. There will be Christ figures, the likes of Charles Manson and the People’s Temple leader, Jones are simply illustrations of the these false Christs, people who claim to be Jesus. They will continue to deceive; they will all have followers who will follow them, in many cases, to death. Many years ago when I used to stay at Men’s res as an undergraduate student, I had a conversation with one lady who was convinced that their pastor hears directly from the holy spirit and so, even if what he said did not agree with the bible she strongly believed was still God’s word. I could not understand how could the Holy Spirit not agree with the very word he established in the bible. In recent years there has been a rise of these deceivers, they place themselves above the word of God through claiming Holy Spirit privileges above their congregation.

Some time back I even saw a documentary of some Pastors who will travel to Nigeria because of their hunger for power. They are hungry to have the power to make people fall and perform miracles. They themselves are deceived, for they want powers to promote numbers in their churches. They want to be centres of attraction instead of Jesus. They are actually under the power of the dark work and actually practicing some form of witchcraft. In fact my grandfather who was in the Methodist church as a Priest, hearing from my grandmother, would hear of rumours of a number of Priests who would visit sangoma’s in order to make their sermons powerful. God’s word does not even promote such desires, these are all man centred desires, in 1 Cor 14:1 reads, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.” Prophecy here is the gift of speaking or teaching God’s word to others. For the bible tells us all these things will pass away but my word will remain. This sin and deception is not new, the fallen Angel Satan wanted equality with God. Remember that he fell with some powers that is why witchcraft exists. The desire of mankind to be have powers and be influential in the world is same sin of wanting equality with God. And Satan will give some powers to them as we have been witnessing.

Verse 22 says, “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” You see these false messiahs and false prophets will have powers to perform wonders and deceive many. People are venerable even some believers, whenever they witness some powers from a so called man of God, they give their whole hearts away. They are so good that even the true believers, could be deceived. However, true believers will not be easily deceived. True believers places their trust in the word of God as taught in the Bible. Like the Berean believers, when they hear a teaching, they compare it with what the bible teaches. In these last days, Jesus warns us to watch out that no one deceives us.

Secondly, Jesus tells us not be alarmed of wars and rumours in verse 7. This is human history, wars, hot and cold wars, between nations and kingdoms have been a reality through every year of history, and we’re not getting any better. Our Lord accurately foresaw the world would never know peace, never improve morally, never improve socially, never improve spiritually. That it would rather devolve into worse and worse condition. In World War II, 72 million people died. In 755 - let’s go back to 755 to 763, a period of time of the great war in China 36 million people died. In the Mongol conquest in the 13th century, 30 to 60 million; 20 million in World War I, and so it goes and that is human history, and it’s not changing. It will escalate. So if you feeling some sense of despair, it simply means you had placed too much hope in people and this world. Truth is, sin is real and all of these are consequences of sin, we are born sinners and are utterly hopeless without Jesus.

We hear a lot of bad news every day about wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Chad. In recent times, Israel, Palistine, Russia and Ukraine, and most recent possibly Iran and USA. There is so much bad news reported by the media. I used to actually get depressed from listening to the news, shd Desmond even told me he stopped listening to power FM. My wife used to tell me to actually stop listening to it. You just get drained by bad news all over the show. 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 because it is in fear that we become vulnerable. 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. Jess says such bad news will be around, but the end has not yet come.

Third, all these are the beginning of birth pains. Look at verse 8, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.” In addition to wars, there are many natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, and famines. Through history, millions and millions have died in earthquakes. worst is yet to come, Revelation 6 and 8, our Lord says, “Those things” in verse 7 and 8 “must take place, but that’s not yet the end.”

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. As believers we should be different in how we view natural disasters and catastrophes. We should not despair, but filled with hope hat God’s kingdom is coming, just a matter of time.

Now that Jesus has shown us through the bible what we can and are already experiencing is no way close to the end, but some signs that point to the birth pains. Verses from 9 to 13, is about, what is God doing and how we can participate? Look at verse 9a, “You must be on your guard….” 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. 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 9b, “…You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. 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 peoples. 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. 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.

Let us all read verse 10, **“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”** In spite of the hatred, God has a plan, the gospel is going to go to the ends of the world, they will not stamp it out. In fact there is saying that, the blood of those who died because of the gospel become the seed of the church. In Acts 1:8, He said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel; Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth; be My witnesses.” We are 2,000 years after that, and the gospel has, for all intents and purposes, covered most part of the world. 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. Such that the end of the world depends on it. For it is only when the gospel has reached all the world that the end will come. God also provides a personal promise in verse 11, that when arrested and brought to trial, the Holy Spirit will provide what is necessary to be said [11]. 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. 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.

In verse 12, Jesus says not only will you be persecuted by the Jews, and persecuted by the Gentiles, you’ll be persecuted in your own family: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.” I just can’t imagine how hard it was for them to hear this, they had so much hope. There would literally be animosity in a family. In Matthew 10 and 14, Jesus says many times, “You have to hate your father, hate your mother, your sister, your brother, even your own life, to be My disciple?” This is not like a feeling of hate, but rather our love the gospel and Jesus comes first. This then will look like we hate family members who try to shift us away from the gospel and Jesus. This is reality and it corresponds to scripture, the bible. I know there is a number of you here who are already fighting or in conflict with either parents or family members over what your faith in Christ Jesus. Jesus was correct about the destruction of the temple. He was correct about endless deception, escalating at the end, so do not be discouraged, but rather preach the gospel for Jesus is with you through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In fact verse 13 says, “Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” How can we survive? How can we handle this, how can we handle Jewish persecution, Gentile persecution, family hatred, family persecution, family execution, how can we handle it? The truth is, the one who endures to the end, he will be saved; and what are we learning from that? That false Christians will not be able to handle it. “By your endurance”, Luke 21:19 – “you will gain your lives.” You don’t earn salvation by endurance; you prove you have the real thing by endurance. Superficial faith will collapse under persecution, in John 2:19 we read, “They went out from us because they were not of us”. This is basic gospel truth: authentic, God-given faith will endure, because the Holy Spirit will provide strength, God will provide grace. Trouble, deception, persecution, suffering, will burn up the fake, it’ll reveal the shallow, weedy, rocky ground of false profession, and under these kinds of pressures, superficial interest in Christ will have no endurance. I say again, we don’t earn our salvation by enduring, we don’t keep our salvation by gritting our teeth and enduring, we demonstrate our salvation by enduring. We have a salvation that’s a gift of grace; it’s authenticated in the midst of suffering. James says “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance.” True faith is strengthened to endure.

Now from verses 14-23, Jesus reveals the signs of the tribulation, the actual birth pains. So far Jesus answered the question on what the beginning of birth pains will look like. That is why verse 19 says, 19because those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now, and never to be equaled again.” Look at verse 14, “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ a standing where it does not belong, **let the reader understand**, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” that’s the event, a major event that will let everyone know, “You are in the time of tribulation.” When that happens, you will know you are in the time of tribulation. Please notice: this was not for the disciples. This was for readers - see it? “Let the reader understand.” That is not added by some editor; that is what Mark wrote.

The things that have been indicated here are happening now through all of human history. However, we are not yet at the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION, the time of the great tribulation, or the return of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to stuff these things in to the event of 70 A.D, or any other event in the past. The Lord has already began with the immediate destruction of the temple, and He was absolutely accurate about that, as all Scripture is. Then what is this, The ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION. In the book of Matthew, he says, “Which was spoken of by the prophet Daniel” - spoken of by the prophet Daniel, Daniel spoke about it, three times. We will not dive into Daniel it will move us away from the main point of this message. However, Daniel three times refers to the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION. Anything that abominates God, anything that blasphemes God, and at the same time, desolates, or destroys. There will come along an act of blasphemy that will devastate or desecrate. In a nutshell, that is the coming of the Antichrist.

**In conclusion,** we are living is hard times, as believers it will only get harder all because of the gospel of Jesus. We live in times of increased rejection of God and what the bible teachers. The role of men and women have been twisted. More women are now made to assume roles of mean. Our ever increasing busy life, is forcing women to be more outside the home and be nature’s of their children. SGB’s at schools no longer value prayer meetings at public schools, increased legalization of abortion, and in the approval of gay marriages. Two years ago minister of education approved the non gender toilets at public schools. And all these influences come from the so called developed nations. I believe that the only hope for Africa and the world in these times 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. Verse 10 says, **“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations**. This was not only encouragement or command, but was also a promise from Jesus, that the gospel will first be preached to all nations. May we identify with Jesus by accepting this promise in our hearts and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and peach the gospel. Let’s make a new decision to preach the gospel as of first importance, especially on our campuses. Amen!