

THE GOSPEL MUST FIRST BE PREACHED

Mark 13:1-23 (Key verse 10)

“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations”

Covid_19 has changed how we live. It has really humbled us to levels we never thought we'd come to. Many people joked about this virus, and making silly songs. But suddenly, it hid us. In March this year the government declared a national state of disaster, and the entire country was under lockdown ever since. In the past, we used to openly come to the worship service in campus, but now we are having it online. We used to move freely, greet each other without any fears. But now, we are restricted and confined to our homes with limited movements. We can't even clear our throats without the fear of Covid_19. Many people have died because of this virus, and a lot have lost jobs and in severe hardships. Because our lives have so much changed, and truly shaken, we might feel that surely the end is near. We might have many questions; trying to understand the mind of God about these times, and even asking ourselves 'how can we survive in these difficult times'?

In today's passage, Jesus reacts and teaches the disciples' who were shocked that the end is near. It is from these words of Jesus that we can be equipped to watch out not to be deceived, to stand firm not to be shaken and fall from our faith, be on our guard from the attack of the evil one, and most importantly find an answer to the question, *'how can we survive in these difficult end times'?*

Let us see how it all started. The disciples were amazed at the beauty and the magnificence of the temple. The temple was as magnificent as the Eiffle Tour in Paris at night, as glorious as Sandton City, so spectacular as the Victoria Falls or Table Mountain. They were in awe of the temple, and adored it. 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!”** How did Jesus respond? Did He join the disciple in their fascination? Interestingly, Jesus didn't. He was rather heedful and pessimistic. **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.”** Jesus told them that the temple will be completely destroyed. This was unexpected. The disciples were shocked and alarmed so, **3 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?”** It is interesting that the disciples automatically thought about the end times immediately when Jesus told them that the temple will be destroyed. What is the end, and why must there be the end? According to the disciples, they understood the end as only very dark and difficult times, leading to the end of all things. However, according to Jesus, the end times are times are not only times of great distress, but most importantly to transition us into a new life, and a new Kingdom of God. The whole world has been corrupted by sin. Sin must be completely be destroyed and wiped off so that the new world without sin and suffering take effect.

The disciples were so alarmed and troubled, anticipating times of hardships because their glorious temple would be destroyed. So, they had to come to Jesus privately to get more details and signs. It is not that they wanted to prepare themselves, but more out of their personal ambitions which was at risk. If the temple is destroyed, there goes their ambitions of being ministers in the earthly kingdom of Jesus. What is it about the temple that its destruction brings so much fear in them, and a precursor of the end? The temple was nothing like it on earth. King Solomon built it and

adorned it with magnificent colourful and precious stones. It was destroyed by the Babylonians who invaded Israel, however was rebuilt. Later on, king Herod also rebuilt and even enlarged it. Even though it was less magnificent to the former temple, Herod had done a good job that it marvellous to the many like the disciples and the Israelites of the times. The temple was the central institution of Israel's religion, political and economic life. It was the only place of worship of the Only True God 'The God of Israel'. Many, to that day, were offering sacrifices and keeping up with religious practices from the law of Moses. Many people would travel to Jerusalem from far villages and even countries/continents to worship God. As a result, it brought good economic fruits through tourism as well. Politically, there is no Israel without the temple. Priestly hierarchies brought about power through which those serving in the temple ruled over Judea under the Roman governor. We can see how important the temple was to the identity and survival of the nation and people of Israel. It's destruction would indeed bring calamity unheard of. The temple represented the security of Israel, without which they would indeed perish. So it's destruction would indeed bring hell to them, and destroy their well-being. That was the one thing they never imagined they would lose, and in fact never lose. No wonder they were running around frantically. Their attachment to the temple reveals this serious problem which Jesus wanted to address, and warn them against.

What are our temples? What is the one thing that we say, “I cannot survive without this”? What are those things we say about them, “I can lose many things, but not these ones, these cannot be touched”? What are those things that when we hear, “they will all be destroyed”, we are filled with all sorts of fear and shaken? Are our temples our jobs, employment and businesses? Are they our studies? Are they our loved ones? Are they our recreational activities? If I were to lose my job, will I say “To God be the glory”? Do I so much love my studies or my job that anything else, even God should come second? I am sure they are many. Those are our temples, our idols. Jesus is, however, giving us a stern warning, and their reality about them. They will be destroyed! Even though we hear these words from Jesus, we tend to hold on to our temples. Jesus says that they will all be destroyed. They are destined to be destroyed. There is no need to hold on them. This is indeed shocking, and troubling; that the many things that define our lives are perishable, and will be destroyed.

So, how do we survive in these difficult times? How can we live in this world which will come to an end? Yes, we must first understand that there is no security whatsoever that we can find in this world. They will all be destroyed. Why are they all perishable? Why will all of these be thrown down? It is because only Jesus is our security. There are many counterfeits that will try to give us false hopes. There are many people who will literally and verbally claim, “I am He[Jesus]”. Some will be more cunning and come in the name of Jesus to deceive many of us who are not on the watch. All these are the false Christs; pretending to be Christ but not at all. No matter what form they come, in order to survive in these times, we must first understand and accept that no one and nothing will ever replace Jesus; they will all be destroyed! Why do these false Christs use the name of Jesus? In their deceit, there is truth. They use the name of Jesus because there is absolutely nothing in this world that gives security, peace and contentment other than Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus to the world was indeed a game changer. Ever since He came, hope also arose; many are saved from their sins, many were healed of infirmities and sicknesses, many received hope in Jesus and felt, to this day, secure in Him. It is indeed the truth; Jesus is the only hope of the world. He remains the same yesterday, today and forever. Though many things will fall and be destroyed, He is our rock! To survive in these times, may we hear the voice of Jesus speaking in our hearts “I am He”. May we silence all false Christs by hearing the voice of Jesus only, “I am He”. May we hear

the voice of Jesus clearly say "I am your security, your salvation, your only true hope".

I am going through something I never even anticipated in my life; being jobless and struggling to find a job. I managed to graduate from Wits and got several promotions, the most significant of which was last year in September in Standard Bank. I was so excited and financially was okay. I felt I have room to do many things, prepare to get married and even travel the world. I bought my second property and upgraded my car to a much more comfortable BMW. I felt secure. Many would say I was 'balling'. But in just a space of two months it all came crashing down. I got sick and the manager at standard bank could bare that I am sick, rightfully so I can say, and didn't trust me. Things quickly turned sour and my relationship with him was shaking if not destroyed. Things escalated that took it upon myself that it is better to resign to avoid many complications, and I can find another job soon with my skills and experience. But, that was not the case in March the country was under lockdown and the economy shut. Jobs became impossible to find, even to this day. I never expected this. Of recent, I would get several promising roles and on the verge of signing the deal, only to hear that, 'we are sorry, we went for someone else'. I even received a call from one of the recruiters asking me that how is it that I have not secured a role for the many job applications which we sent through? I was speechless, and honestly answered her, "I do not know". I thank God for this message, and in fact very necessary for me in these dark times. I honestly do not know what God's will is. I want a job or need to make a living urgently. God knows my needs, but so far nothing has come. It remains a struggle and a frustration. I really do not know the meaning of all this; what God's will is for what I am going through. But one thing is clear, only Jesus is my hope. This is the one real situation where I am genuinely learning how to not put my trust in the temples of this world, but rather hold on to Jesus for He is He. Please continue to pray for me that I find the biggest treasure of my life; knowing that Jesus is my security.

If Jesus is not our hope and Lord, we will not survive the issue of wars and rumours of wars. Nation will raise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Because of being ruled by greed, wars and conflicts are inevitable. Above, because there is so much godlessness; people living by whatever they want, not by God Almighty, there will forever be quarrels leading to kingdoms and nations fighting. Without Jesus as our individual personal Lord, we are bound to even see brothers betraying each other to death, fathers neglecting their prime duty to protect their children and abusing them. Without Jesus being taught to even little children, they will grow in this wickedness that they rebel against their parents, and even put them to death. Jesus must be the Lord of all in this world in order to survive. Let us reflect on the teachings and the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus does not teach us to accumulate wealth or work for food that spoils. Rather He teaches us to be reach towards God. Jesus does not teach us to fight, to be selfish and be in war with each other, but rather He teaches us to wash each other's feet, to love each other as we love ourselves and protect each other. So, to survive in these end times, it is so important to have Jesus as our personal Lord, and Lord of all nations and kingdoms.

The other signs about the end times are of natural disasters; earthquakes in various places and famines. By the grace of God, Africa experienced minimal earthquakes, however there is a lot of poverty and many people including children are dying of hunger. Rains over the years have become irregular due to global warming. Many countries especially in Asia have experienced large earthquakes, storms and floods even in the so called super nations like the USA. All these signal the end times. They are here, and have surely come to pass and are still in effect. How should we see them? Jesus says that these are only the beginning of birth pains. They are not the end. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. It

is easy to thing they are the end, and fall into a space of hopelessness and simply give up. For this reason, this calls for us to persevere, and endurance in these tough times. We still need to watch out, stand firm and be on our guard. Life will be really hard until all things come to an end. So, we really need to stand strong and survive.

Jesus further told them about the sign of preaching the gospel. Look at verse 9-11. **"You must be on your guard. 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. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.** Why is Jesus now turning His attention to witnessing about the gospel? What is the gospel? The gospel is the love letter of God to all people in this world; us. It speaks about the account of Jesus who came to this dusty sinful world to save from their sins through His sacrificial death. So far it has been gloomy. There seems to be no hope; wars, famines, earthquakes and false Christs. But suddenly, there seems to be good news about these end times. Jesus speaks about how the disciples and the many believers to come would face much persecution; being handed over to be flogged before the authorities in these world; the local councils, governors and kings. They would face unprecedented difficulties on account of Jesus, and the gospel they were preaching.

This brings us to today's key verse Mark 13:10. **And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.** Once more, how can we live in these difficult times? The answer is to preach the gospel to all nations. The end will not come until the gospel is preached to all nations. Why is preaching the gospel our best way to survive? It is because the gospel is the only hope and shining light in these dark and difficult times. And also, the gospel prepares us to be ready for the new world to come.

Firstly, the gospel is our only source of hope and shining light in these dark end times. Unfortunately, there is a lot of death and meaninglessness that is preached these days. No wonder we easily become weary and are discouraged. Jesus however says, "Preach the gospel first to all nations".

The USA elections this year are quite competitive. In a country that is so much divided, and the world that is always at disagreements with each other, there seems to be a cry for unity to end all differences and to live in peace among each other; equitably. The USA have been rocked by many issues of immigration, racism and sheer hatred for one another. Many people thought that President D Trump is the CEO of all these issues. So, they took it to the polls this month to elect the 46th president of the US. A lot of money and campaigning was invested where presidential candidates Joe Biden and Donal Trump preached their message of hope to the voters across. They worked very hard so that they be appealing to the voters. Many promises were made and amazingly a lot of people turned out to the polling stations. These were the highest recorded numbers voters in the US. I can understand how people want hope and change. As it stands, Joe Bidden has been projected the 46th democratically elected president of the US. He was able to reach the much needed minimum 270 electoral college votes. He is the new president of the US after much preaching and campaigning. To many people, he is the hope that so many people want. We also will have our municipal elections next year. Once again, political parties will be coming to us to preach their promises. History teaches us that all these political parties, whether in South Africa or in the US, always fall short to what they promised they would do. It is like we are sold every time.

There is something about preaching, and witnessing that is so powerful. The power behind that preaching is the object of the message. If the object is fallible, and not God, we can almost be certain that such preaching will bring no change, if not adding more misery. However, we have a far better object behind the preaching of the gospel. That object is Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives us the power and even the words to speak, penetrating the hardened and stubborn hearts of all those hearing. We don't even need to worry about what to say even in the face of tough opposition and great trials. The preaching of the gospel doesn't speak about fascination and imaginations. It is not about lies, but the truth about Jesus who came to this world to save all nations from their sins. You know, these days many laugh at Christians as if they are crazy. You can't even speak about Jesus among your colleagues, friends and families because we anticipate the ridicule and persecutions that would come. We easily get into the state of even doubting what we preach. Because of these fears, it becomes much more easy to just in and at most blend in with the world. However, Jesus reminds us on the importance of the gospel. Yes, there may be many people against the gospel and not accepting it. But, Jesus says that there is a multitude of people; nations and kingdoms of different people who are yearning to hear and believe what the gospel say. Last week we learned about our need to solve our sinful problems first. Many are yearning for the truth, and are frustrated by this deceptive and selfish world that will soon be destroyed. This is the truth; God, so much, loves all of us. He came in flesh, left His heavenly dwellings and came to this dusty terrible world in the image of His son Jesus. He was born in a manger, and lived among us, teaching many, even until His crucifixion on the cross for our redemption. He was never overcome by death like most people, but rose from the dead by the power and glory of God and ascended in to the heavens giving us the commission **...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Mt 28:19-20).**

Indeed, the gospel of Jesus is our survival tool in these difficult times. For this reason, it must first be preached before the end comes. It must first be preached more so in these tough times. Its preaching reminds us that anything else we hold on to will come crushing down, and together with those who hold on to it. Am I hopeless because of joblessness; I must preach the gospel of Jesus to myself. Suddenly, the pleasant and powerful message I hear overcomes all fear from my heart. Am I struggling to make ends meet at work or at home. The gospel must be preached to myself and my boss. Suddenly, one gets to understand to respect all authorities at work and work all the harder as though working for God. Suddenly my boss gets to understand that s/he will have to account to the mistreatment and unfairness given to the employees. Am I struggling with my studies? I need to first study the gospel of Jesus and accept it in my heart. Suddenly great encouragement and the help of God comes to my heart to study all the more, put in the hours and understand to pass my exams. Am I struggling with sin, so shamefully wasting away in secret because of it? The gospel must be preached to myself. I need to diligently study the bible, prepare the question paper, attend the worship service whether online or in person, and meditate on the word of God through testimony writing. The gospel is the solution for everything in these dark and difficult end times. Am I so much consumed with work or my studies? According to Jesus, it is better to preach the gospel. This is the only work we can do and be certain, without doubt, that it will yield fruits into eternal life. We are busy bodies. I know I am. We waste away in works leading to destruction. If not playing some sports soccer, cricket, gym, tennis we are busy at work leaving so late. If not studying across nights, we are busy engaging in sinful activities. If not idle and sleeping, we are quick to use personal commitments as excuses for not preaching the gospel. Jesus however here so much encourage us to first, and at all times, preach the gospel. It

is our only hope. However, the world treat the gospel as if it is only for the elect, the super spiritual. "No, I cannot be a shepherd. I am way to young to preach the gospel to my peers. They'll think I am weird, and in fact it is weird." But we forget this gospel must be preached to all nations without discrimination or any sort of election if not qualification. The only qualification to preach the gospel is to believe in Jesus as Lord and keep up with repentance. The media preaches this message of doom, though adorned with false glory and false truths. Go study, you will be secure. Work hard and save money, you will overcome these coming times. Open up insurances and you have peace of mind. All these are deceptive, because they will all be destroyed. Only the gospel of Jesus can stand against all these dark times. For this reason, we need to preach it.

I am so encouraged by the life of our brothers and sisters. Recently, Msn Daniel and Miso, have went back home. It is safe to say these are outstanding grand parents we've ever seen. They preached the gospel even in their old age, and they will continue to preach it. They served so many of us and campus students with love and commitment to the Lord. They believed in the power of the gospel in these end times. I am very much encouraged by them. Even more so with many of our brothers and sisters who continue to work for God despite their many problems. Bro Silence hold some bible studies with his friends at res. Yes, he has so much doubt if he understands the scriptures that well that he can teach and preach it. Yet, he is moved by what he heard about Jesus Christ, and seeing the need to preach the gospel. I was very much encouraged. Many of us have our many problems, yet, we find ourselves still committed to the gospel of Jesus. Many are looking for employment breakthrough, success in studies, facing many deep personal issues, in sickness even during this covid_19 pandemic. Yet, the gospel of Jesus is still preached and active in our hearts. We do not have worship services in campus, but we diligently join our online worship service despite the many challenges we have with it. Many are preparing for their weddings and marriages, yet, they are not overcome by the temporary glamour of it. They still preach the gospel to this day. We are on the right track. I am encouraged. May we now with heart charge on. May the gospel of Jesus indeed be first preached to all nations, and all students in campuses.

Yes, the gospel is our only survival in these times. More so because it prepares us for the end. When the end comes, there will not be a time of mercy from the Lord God. It is the end because all things must be destroyed so that a new life in the kingdom of God be eternally established. What a lie to think the end will not come. Jesus has already told us about the signs that the end will indeed come. What a great deception to think we can simply buy a ticket into heaven? That we can simply cry a river of tears and the Lord will be moved to let us in His kingdom as the entire creation is destroyed! What a deception to even think that the is no end? How can we be prepared, and qualified to enter in the new kingdom of God after the end? We need to hear the gospel of Jesus so that we can be saved. This is the great love of God. In as much as this current world must be destroyed, God so much thought about all the people of all nations to hear this message of hope so that they too can be in the new kingdom of God. This current world will waste away and be destroyed together with those who cling to it. If the gospel of Jesus is not preached, who then can we know the truth and be saved? Yet, this is our hope. This the great love of God that He willed for all people to hear about the saving power of God. For this reason, all of us have the potential to all be saved, because the gospel must first be preached to all nations. So, let us treasure the gospel of Jesus. It is our light, it is our hope. It is our key into the kingdom of God where there will be no weeping and suffering. We can be this much certain about the gospel of Jesus. When it is preached, by the help of the Holy Spirit, know this for sure, It will change the hearts of those exposed to it and lead them to Jesus for the salvation of their souls!

In conclusion, we can look forward to the day of great distress; the abomination that causes desolation. Though such times will be, and are, of great difficulties, unequalled and never to be equalled again, we however have faith through gospel of Jesus. Let us encourage and strengthen ourselves with this gospel. Let our hearts soak in it so that we can look forward to the day of His return and the new life He gives His elect who preach and believe in it with all their hearts. It is the power of God. Let us share this great love of God with the people around us and across us; all nations. It is love of God. We cannot hold any longer to anything in this world. There is no such a thing a security from this world. Many things are crumpling and crashing down. For this reason, **10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations!**