

## *Until the End*

### *Mark 13:1-8*

*There was a time, the ancients say,  
When sea skies seemed to spread out calm  
And peaceful as a Sunday psalm,  
When savage storms were far away.*

*But now the sky's blue dome's grown dark  
With boiling banks of billowed clouds.  
The thunder's rumbling booms are loud,  
And lightning crackles streams of sparks.*

*Pretenders cloud what should be clear,  
The prince's despots rule and rail,  
And life's a leaf lost in a gale.  
Still, I've decided not to fear,*

*For thunder is my Father's voice,  
The lightning is the very way  
My King will split the skies one day,  
And fear, like faith, is but a choice.*

Jewish farmers and small town fishermen, shopkeepers and servants stared at the temple with wide eyes. Even the disciples were dazzled by its glory. But that is understandable.

It was hard not to be overcome with awe. The temple was a wonder. A big bridge arched over a deep ravine on the west side of the porches and paving stones on Mount Zion. And each of the massive stones in that bridge weighed sixty tons.

But that was only the beginning. Up on the courtyards, forty foot marble pillars held up tile roofs to shade worshipers.

Eager to curry favor with the Jews, Herod the Great funded an enormous relief sculpture of a bunch of grapes on the front of the sanctuary. And each grape was five feet in diameter.

Sosius was the Roman governor of Syria. And he donated a huge golden wreath to adorn Solomon's Porch.

The disciples stared at the splendor all around them. They pointed to wonder after wonder. Overflowing with excitement and awe one of them expressed his admiration to the Master.

*As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." Verses 1-2*

Our Lord was leaving the temple for the last time. He had pleaded with His people to repent and turn to the God of their fathers. But they would not. So they could not escape God's judgement.

Jesus spoke about that judgement. He nodded toward the marble pillars and stone sculptures and gave them a glimpse of the future.

All the glory and gold, the limestone building blocks and marble pillars would be torn down one day. That shocked the disciples.

It didn't seem possible. Yes, the Babylonians had reduced the temple to rubble several centuries earlier.

But it was hard to believe the grand and glorious temple would be destroyed again. So they asked Him about it.

***As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" Verses 3-4***

Matthew's account of the disciples' questions is a little more specific.

***Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? Matthew 24:3***

The disciples assumed the temple would be destroyed the same time our Redeemer returns to set up His earthly kingdom. They were wrong about that, of course.

But Jesus didn't bother to correct them. Instead, He answered both of their questions: the destruction of the temple and His return at the end of time.

He began with some warnings. Christ knew many generations would live before His return. And believers need to be prepared to face great perils.

### ***Christ's Coming and the False***

Soon. God's Son would lay down His life, offering the full and final blood sacrifice for sin. And Satan was powerless to stop it.

But that does not mean the devil was willing to accept defeat and abandon every effort to oppose God. Far from it.

The tempter knows Christians long for their Lord's return. He also knows he cannot stop Christ's coming.

Still, he does what he can. He offers alternatives: false Christs and sham Saviors.

Our Lord doesn't want those who trust in Him to be ambushed and taken by surprise. So He warned us of our enemy's plan.

***And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many." Verses 5-6***

It is a hard fact of life. But everyone who chooses to love and live for Jesus Christ is a foreigner in a hostile country. Because of that, every believer aches for the Redeemer's return.

Our Lord doesn't want us to be deceived and defeated by the devil's deception. So He warned us that some men will claim to be Christ come back. And others will come as lying prophets.

***For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. Matthew 24:24-25***

Don't miss the Master's message. Pretending prophets and counterfeit Christs are inspired and empowered by Satan. And some of them will work stunning signs and surprising wonders.

So we dare not be mesmerized by miracles. Signs and wonders are never proof a man's message is genuine. And we must constantly be on guard against being gullible and easily misled.

***Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,***

***because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1***

And there is but one way to test whether a person is inspired by God's Spirit or by Satan's. Every prophecy and preaching must be weighed against our only infallible guide: God's Holy Word.

Only the unchanging truth of the Scriptures can expose doctrine that is in error or out of balance. And anything that is not in complete accord with the apostles' teaching must not only be rejected. It must be condemned.

***...even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! Galatians 1:8-9***

It makes no difference how educated or esteemed a preacher or teacher might be. We dare not listen to anyone who does not proclaim the pure and perfect Gospel of grace.

Some distort the message of salvation by reducing the requirements for redemption. Others add empty works and rituals to the demands of discipleship. And still others promote themselves and personal loyalty to a leader.

The gospel the disciples proclaimed is simple. Jesus was and is and ever shall be God's sinless Son. He lived a perfect life, died on a cross to pay for our sins, and rose up from among the dead.

And all we have to do to be saved is trust in Him, confessing and forsaking our sins and committing our lives to Christ. Anyone who teaches anything other than that is an imposter, pretender and enemy. He is promoting allegiance to a false Christ.

It makes no difference what a man might call himself. Be he swami or soothsayer, prophet or preacher, healer or herald, we must not be misled.

Such pretenders cannot be Christ come back. When our Redeemer returns, He will not slip in a back door. There will be nothing secret or silent about the Savior's coming.

***For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Matthew 24:27***

Our Lord's return isn't a matter of *if*. Only *when*! And on that glorious day, every eye will see Him. Until then, we are to trust only in Him. And not in any man.

## ***Christ's Coming and the Fearful***

Men always have and always will try to mislead us. They will proclaim false gospels and promote false Christs.

But such satanic servants are not the only way sincere saints can be misled. Troublesome times can do the same thing.

***When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. Verses 7***

Jesus warned us that dangerous times will surely come. Wars will turn peaceful pastures into bombed out wastelands. And nuclear weapons will leave whole cities like seas of glistening glass.

But such disasters are not the only coming calamities. There will also be riots and revolutions that forever change whole societies.

That, our Redeemer would remind us, is inevitable and to be expected. But even when death and destruction are all around us, we must not be deceived. Manmade wars will not destroy the world.

Such terrible times are not a sign our Savior is at the door, either. Christ's coming will not be heralded by social upheaval or economic collapse, by epidemic diseases or enduring famines.

So we must not be misled. Neither are we to be terrified into a panic. After all, God Himself is both our Protector and Provider.

***God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Psalm 46:1-3 (NIV)***

Even in the worst of times, our gracious God is still in complete control of our lives. He still provides

and protects us.

Nothing can change that. Heaven and earth will pass away. But His Word never will.

We are not to fear despots and dictators, either. Their swords and spears, even their bombs and missiles should not stab icicles of fear into God's people. After all, they are but men.

***Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies and of the son of man who is made like grass, that you have forgotten the Lord your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, that you fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, as he makes ready to destroy? Isaiah 51:12-13***

The worst anyone can do to those of us who trust in Jesus Christ is to send us home to Heaven where we will be with our loving Lord forever. So we have nothing to fear.

The book of Revelation describes a time when men will be so filled with fear, their hearts will fail them. Such times will surely come. And when they do, panicked people have but one hope.

They need to see the sweet serenity that only comes from trusting in Jesus Christ. And if they do not see it in us, there is little hope they will see it anywhere else.

### ***Christ's Coming and the Faithful***

Just a few days before He would be crucified, Christ warned His disciples that terrible times would come.

***For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. Verse 8***

World wide warfare was unknown in the disciples' day. But it is in ours. Again and again, soldiers have waged war across entire continents.

Great ships have stained the seas with blood. Cities have been reduced to rubble. And earthquakes have leveled entire cities.

Volcanos have turned entire islands and cities into smoldering ashes. Plagues have wiped out entire populations. And famines have starved people into walking skeletons.

Those terrible times have happened before. And Christ counseled His disciples they will surely come again. Nevertheless, neither then nor now, are believers to live in fear of them.

Most important of all, such cataclysms must never be allowed to eclipse Christians' faith in their loving Lord. Far from fear, the Savior said such signs should breathe hope into believers.

Sitting on the side of the Mount of Olives, our Lord added an important conclusion to His warnings.

***These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Mark 13:8***

Global catastrophes are like the beginning of labor. They are signs the end is sure to come.

Birth pains in a woman are a sign that the birth process has begun. And once such contractions have started, there is no turning back. The baby will surely be born.

In the same way, when we see earthquakes and volcanos, famines and pandemic diseases, we know that the birth process for Christ's earthly kingdom has begun.

And there can be no turning back. Our Savior will surely split the skies with His return.

Also, birth pains increase both in frequency and intensity. Contractions may be mild at first. But each hour they become more and more intense. Also, at first they are separated by long minutes.

But each contraction comes sooner and sooner. That is another sure sign a baby is about to be born.

The same is true of the calamities Christ described. A single volcano or earthquake is not a sign the Savior's coming is imminent. Neither is a single famine, epidemic or war evidence our Lord will come immediately.

But a pattern of such crises is a sure sign. As such terrible troubles become worse and worse, we know Christ's coming nears. And as such cataclysms come closer and closer together, we are reminded once again that our Redeemer's return is near.

When our Lord taught us to pray, He commanded us to pray for His coming. And as we do, our faith in our Savior and His Holy Word is to be steady and strong.

***You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. James 5:8***

Even the very worst calamity must not be allowed to force us off the straight and narrow path of faith in Christ. No matter what happens, we are to keep on praising and worshiping our loving Lord.

We are to keep on trusting and obeying His Word, too. And we are to faithfully follow our Savior's example.

Uncounted multitudes live in desperate fear of dying. But the actual death process is brief. In a moment, their hearts will still and their bodies will grow cold.

However, there is a worse fate than being caught up in combat or killed by an earthquake or an epidemic. How tragic it is for people to live in fear of death, only to be thrust into the eternal death of Hell!

If Christ does not come soon, each of us will face physical death. That is unavoidable.

But if we trust in Jesus as our Savior and King, death is but a doorway that leads to the fountains of joy and oceans of peace in our heavenly Father's eternal city.

We who trust in our blessed Savior came to know Him because someone took the time to tell us about His light and love. Now it is our turn.

Now we are the ones who are to tell people, who are alone and afraid in the world without God, that Jesus loves them and died for them. So we dare not be so filled with fear rather than faith that we are scared into silence.

If we are, the calamities that are sure to come will be but the beginning of savage, eternal sorrows for our friends and neighbors.

And we will be to blame.