

## *The Elect and the End*

### *Mark 13:14-20*

*Just as it always has, the Sun  
Will melt the morning mists away,  
And only memories will stay  
Of lives long gone and deeds undone.*

*But bruised, unbroken, reborn reeds  
(The blood bought flock of wayward sheep  
The Shepherd promised He would keep)  
Are sown in faith like autumn seeds.*

*Like Lazarus, they're listening  
For that triumphant trumpet call,  
"Come up ye hither, one and all  
Who live beyond death's savage sting."*

*As spring fed streams must flow on by  
To disappear around the bend,  
So life on earth comes to an end.  
But ransomed reeds shall never die.*

John was a very old man. All the other disciples who walked with the Master had been buried long ago. So he sat alone in a quiet courtyard at Ephesus remembering. Many years had passed since he watched Jesus drift up into the cloudy sky over the Mount of Olives.

During his long life, John watched the church spark at Jerusalem and flame into a fire that spread all around the Mediterranean.

But the growing church wasn't a hothouse plant, growing in serenity and safety. Bitter enemies waged open warfare against the Savior and His servants. They reminded John of the man of sin he saw in a vision when he was exiled on Patmos.

***...just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared;  
1 John 2:18***

In the last seven years of world history, a man the Bible calls the Antichrist will arise. And he will live up to his name as both a false Christ and a vicious, violent enemy of our Lord.

But that man of sin will be nothing new. For thousands of years, other men have been forerunners, foreshadowing that final enemy of God's Son.

The horror and holocaust that awaited Jerusalem was not without patterns, either. In Jeremiah's day, Nebuchadnezzar led the chariots and swordsmen of Babylon, clattering up the mountain road to surround and besiege Jerusalem. That was a horrifying foretaste of another siege by another foreign army.

Just forty years after our Redeemer's resurrection, Roman legions surrounded the city just

as the Chaldeans had. And once again, Jews were starved, enslaved and slaughtered.

But even that siege was a pattern for an ultimate holocaust that will take place at the end of the age. Of course, the disciples didn't know that as they sat on the Mount of Olives and questioned Christ about the destruction of Jerusalem.

They thought the devastation Jesus described would be the last horror the Jews would have to endure. So their question combined both events: the destruction of Jerusalem and the Redeemer's return.

***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***

Our Lord answered His disciples' questions as clearly as He could, given their misconceptions.

He described both events at the same time.

## ***The Sign***

The disciples asked for a specific sign that would indicate Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. Our Lord answered them by referring to ancient prophecies written in Babylon by Daniel.

***But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), Verse 14***

An *abomination* is an act of sacrilege so profane and profound it causes both God and His people to abandon the temple, leaving it deserted and desolate. That is precisely what Daniel said the Antichrist will do one day.

Matthew's account adds a defiler will stand in *the holy place*: the holy of holies inside the temple sanctuary.

***Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. Daniel 11:31***

In his second letter to the Macedonian congregation at Thessalonica, Paul explained precisely what that *abomination of desolation* will be.

***Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4***

The Antichrist's very presence in the holy of holies will be more than enough to defile God's house. But that isn't the only sacrilege he will commit.

At Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had his statue erected in a city square and demanded that everyone worship his image. That is what the Antichrist will do. But he will do so in innermost chamber of the temple: the Holy of Holies.

Even that final, despicable defilement of the temple had its pre-patterns. Just two hundred years before the day Jesus spoke on the Mount of Olives, another foreign ruler defiled the temple.

In 168 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes had a small altar erected on top of the great altar that sat on the porch in front of the holy sanctuary. Then he slaughtered a screaming sow on it and dedicated the temple to the Greek god Zeus.

In 70AD the Romans finally broke down the gates and stormed over the walls into Jerusalem. And they provided a yet another preview of *the abomination of desolation*.

Legionnaires under the command of Titus first trampled the holy of holies. Then they set up

idolatrous Roman standards at the temple.

But even that wasn't the last pre-pattern of the sign our Savior said will indicate the end is near. Less than ten years after Jesus' resurrection, the Roman ruler Caligula made plans to set up his own statue in the temple as an object of worship.

Such foretastes of coming judgements are more than curious coincidences. They are opportunities to respond to God's grace and mercy, to turn to Him in confession and repentance.

Of course, we can choose to ignore those clear signs that God will surely judge sin and sinners. But we do so at our own peril.

Jesus died to pay the penalty of blood and death for our sins. His Spirit urges us to trust in Christ's cross and receive His forgiveness. And our Savior said now is the age of acceptance.

But that age of grace and goodness will come to an end one day. And each preview of God's coming judgement is a reminder that time is running out.

## *Safety*

Today, many people prefer to believe there is no God. Believing in neither Heaven nor Hell, they prefer to have nothing at all to do with God. But that option isn't open to anyone. Those who would have nothing to do with God are living in a dream world.

More than likely, some of the Jews at Jerusalem believed the same thing. They too lived as if there was no God and determined to have nothing to do with Him.

But when Roman legions under Titus marched up the mountain road to Jerusalem, they realized their mistake too late. They had no choice but to deal with God. He had determined to deal with them, just as He will deal with every one of us.

Those Jerusalem Jews not only rejected God's Son. They also persecuted and killed His people. So they had no choice but to endure the wrath of the Roman army: the instrument of judgement God chose to use as a whip in His great hand.

Of course, not everyone in Jerusalem was sinful and self-centered. Believers also lived in the Judea when Rome attacked.

And they didn't reject Christ. They prayed for believers and stood with them. So they deserved no judgement at all. And God is never sloppy when He comes to punish people for their sin.

***...the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, 2 Peter 2:9 (ESV)***

That is why our Lord left a simple set of commands designed to deliver those faithful believers when judgement came to Jerusalem.

***...when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Luke 21:20***

***But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. Verses 14-16***

Rabbis called it *the road of the roofs*. Houses in Jerusalem had flat roofs that formed continuing terraces all the way across the city to the city gates.

Jesus warned believing Jews they would stand on the roofs of their houses and see Roman armies swarming over the Mount of Olives. Then, with the clatter of armor in their ears, believers were not to come down. They were to run from housetop to housetop all the way to the city gate and escape to distant mountains.

Those Jewish believers would face strong temptations that day. Some saints would want to hurry inside to pack some clothes or get a bag of coins for the sudden journey.

That would seem like a logical and prudent thing to do. In like manner, it would seem wise

to a farmer working in his field to run back home and get his coat.

But our Savior spoke in the strongest terms possible. They must not waste precious minutes getting provisions or even a change of clothes. They must run as fast as they can to the city gate and flee away to the mountains.

Seasoning God's commandments with our own wisdom can be exceedingly expensive. Those who disobeyed Christ's commands when Roman armies surrounded the city would be trapped inside with the rest of the Jews.

The time when escape was possible would be measured in minutes. Those who waited too long to make their escape would be tortured and killed. And those who didn't make it to the city gates before they were closed would be trapped inside and face starvation.

Our Savior's stern commands remind us that God has but one way to provide safety and security for His people. We must not only believe His Word. We must also obey His commands to the letter.

When we stop short of doing that, we cannot avoid enduring divine penalties that are designed to punish those who neither love nor live for our Lord. Breaking God's commandments breaks us.

That is why some Christian couples face fractured families and bitter divorces. They ignore the strict commandments God outlined for marriage relationships.

And parents are squeezed by sorrow and remorse at the twisted, tortured lives their children lead because those parents chose their own wisdom over God's commandments concerning raising children.

The lesson is unavoidable. There is no substitute for believing and obeying God's commandments.

Our very lives may well hang in the balance.

## *Separation*

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul compared the resurrection of the dead to an ancient harvest ritual.

***Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:20***

When a Jewish farmer's fields were finally ripe, he plucked some the first crops that ripened. Then he presented them to the Lord as a both token of the farmer's gratitude to God and as an act of faith that the full harvest would soon come.

And the apostle Paul wrote that *the first fruits* of the resurrection was when our Redeemer rose up from His garden grave that first Easter morning. That means Christ's victory over death is a promise of a harvest of souls that is yet to come.

Paul described that great harvest of souls in his first letter to Christians at Thessalonica.  
***...if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-4***

The promise that, at some unexpected instant, God will one day resurrect the bodies of believers who have died and at the same time catch away those who are alive is hidden deep in our Savior's statement about the tribulation to come.

***For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. Verse 19***

In that warning, Christ quoted yet another of Daniel's ancient prophecies. And there we see the very same promise Paul repeatedly wrote about.

***And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Daniel 12:1***

The prophet Isaiah also clearly indicated that harvest of souls will rescue God's people before He pours out His wrath upon the earth in the great tribulation.

***Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by. For behold, the Lord is coming out from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, Isaiah 26:19-21 (ESV)***

That is why no Christian needs to worry about the great tribulation that will turn the entire globe into a land of waste and war with destruction beyond anything in all of mankind's history.

God has promised to deliver His people in the great harvest of souls Christians have come to call *the rapture*.

However, a third part of the ancient harvest ritual remains. And it too is duplicated in the harvest of souls.

After the harvesters' scythes had whispered through the fields and all the grain was in the barn, it was time for what the Jews called *the gleaning*. At that time, workers went into the fields and gathered any grain the harvesters missed.

During the seven years of tribulation, some people who had previously rejected Christ as their Savior and Lord will realize their dreadful mistake. And they too will choose to trust in Him. So our Savior also remembered them in His brief account of the tribulation.

***Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. Verse 20***

The people Jesus called *the elect* in that statement are Christians who came to Christ during the terrible tribulation that began after the great harvest of souls. They are the gleaning of God.

For their sake, our Lord will cut short the time when He will savagely judge the inhabitants of this world for their sin and rebellion. So those who are left behind when our God calls all His children home will not be without hope.

But the price for choosing to trust in Jesus Christ then will be persecution and suffering beyond anything this world has ever seen. So the lesson is clear.

The time to trust in Jesus Christ is not tomorrow. It is today.