

THE LORD'S SALVATION ENDURES FOREVER
Sermon for the 25th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021
Mark 13:1-13

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 13:1-13: **As Jesus was going out of the Temple, one of His disciples told Him, "Teacher, look at these massive stones and magnificent buildings!"**

² **Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Truly, not one stone will be left on another. Each one will be thrown down."**

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 these things will happen and what the miraculous sign will be when all these things are going to be fulfilled!"**

⁵ **Jesus began to tell them, "Beware that no one deceives you! ⁶ Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear about wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed! Such things must happen, but that is not yet the end. ⁸ For one nation will rise against another nation, and one kingdom against another kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines. These things are the beginning of birth-pains.**

⁹ **"Nevertheless, watch out for yourselves! For they will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, to testify to them. ¹⁰ The Good News must also first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ When they are taking you away to hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what to say! Instead, say whatever is given you at that time! For you are not the ones who are speaking, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² A brother will betray his brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be put to death. ¹³ All people will also hate you because of My name. However, he who endures to the end will be saved.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

God has given us His Word that shows us His plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. This Word focuses on the forgiveness of sins that Jesus Christ has earned for us by dying on a cross and rising from the dead. It is not the goal of God's Word, the Bible, to give us a comprehensive history of the world. Such a history would be too big. Instead, *the Bible focuses on the history of Jesus and His people*. From the world's point of view, men like Caesar Augustus, Governor Quirinius, and Herod the Great were important rulers. But really, the Bible only mentions these men when their story intersects the story of salvation.

Herod the Great's biblical claim to fame was his attempt to assassinate Jesus by killing off the boys of Bethlehem.¹ Herod had already reigned for a long time when Jesus was born. Becoming senile in his old age, he was dangerous, and even killed members of his own family when he thought they were plotting to take his throne. But murder and political intrigue were not all there was to Herod.

Herod the Great was also responsible for many major building projects during his reign. It is likely that he hoped improvements in the infrastructure of the land would counteract the hatred that the Jews had for him. In fact, for the average man on the street, those people who were not involved in politics, life was prosperous under the rule of Herod.

One of the building projects that Herod had started was a massive upgrade to the temple grounds in Jerusalem. Herod had begun this upgrade about twenty years before Jesus was born and continued after he died. It was completed about 65 AD. It is said that 10,000 laborers worked on the common areas of the temple and 1,000 priests performed the upgrades to the sacred areas of the temple. The historian Josephus tells us that some of the stones that were used were 12 metres by 4 metres by 3 metres. It was a massive undertaking, and the result was quite impressive.

The dates of this building program meant that every time Jesus and His disciples would come to Jerusalem, there was new construction at the temple. It would be very normal for visitors to Jerusalem to take some time to tour the new features of the temple area, admire them, and speculate about what the workers would do next. It would not be at all unusual for anyone to look at the building materials around the temple site and fantasise about the greatness of it all. That is the context of today's reading from the Gospel according to Mark. **As Jesus was going out of the Temple, one of His disciples told**

¹ Matthew 2:16

Him, “Teacher, look at these massive stones and magnificent buildings!” The disciples were thinking that here surely was something built to stand as long as this world would.

So what a shock it must have been when Jesus replied, **“Do you see these great buildings? Truly, not one stone will be left on another. Each one will be thrown down.”** Jesus’ words would come true just five years after the temple upgrade was complete. All those workers had laboured for over eighty years to put all of Herod’s upgrades in place. In 65 AD they put the finishing touches on this magnificent upgrade to the temple, one of the great architectural wonders of the ancient world. Then five years later, in 70 AD, after all of that work, the Roman army marched into Jerusalem and tore the temple down to the ground. Jesus’ prediction came true.

Of course today’s reading is an account of events that happened about forty years before this destruction and the disciples don’t know anything about it. Jesus’ words must have been puzzling to them. The disciples couldn’t very well leave Jesus’ statement alone. So, when they got back to their camp site on the Mount of Olives, they had to ask Jesus for more details. So as **“Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, opposite the Temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Him privately: ⁴“Tell us when these things will happen and what the miraculous sign will be when all these things are going to be fulfilled!”**

It seems that it was in shocked silence that the disciples followed Jesus to the Mount of Olives. There they had a full view of the temple compound in all its glory. The four disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew had also been disciples of John the Baptist, who had spoken of the end of all things.²

Jesus began His explanation in an unusual place. Rather than come right out with a direct answer to the disciple’s question, He warned them about false teachings. **“Beware that no one deceives you! ⁶ Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and will deceive many.”**

Here is Jesus Himself telling His disciples and us that pure doctrine is vitally important. Jesus is warning us that the devil will constantly be sending false teachers our way. He is warning us that these false teachers will be very popular and **“will deceive many.”** How? By claiming to be Christ, or by offering a flimsy substitute for Christ. They appeared before the destruction of Jerusalem, and there have been many since. They are among us even today.

While many today will say they have no religion, or are hostile toward religion, there are those who will harbor a naive attitude toward religion. Such believe that if something is spiritual, then it must be all right, or even benign. This attitude considers the increase in spirituality in our culture today to be good. New Age spirituality, eastern religions, harmony with mother earth, feminist religions, and even dabbling in the occult may mistakenly be welcomed as the opening of the heart of mankind to things spiritual.

However, this is all deception. It turns the soul away from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, back to the evil spirit of darkness that inhabits the heart of unregenerate man. It robs the soul of Jesus Christ.³ It was the father of lies who promised back in the Garden of Eden, *“You will be like God”* (Gen. 3:5).

We must always be on our guard and never assume that something taking the form of religion conveys God’s truth. The gods and religions of this world, like the massive stones of the temple, will all be torn down.

There is only one truth, and it is revealed in the books of the Bible which have stood the test of time. Every archaeological discovery in the Holy Land reveals that another part of the Bible is the truth. The historical reliability of the books of the New Testament cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, many people will take the word of sinful man over the Word of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus is right to warn us of false teachers.

Then there are the persecutions. It is not enough for the false christs to lead people away from the truth, but they must also persecute those who remain faithful. Jesus warns that people will even turn against their own relatives. He says, **“A brother will betray his brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be put to death.”** The Gospel is a divider; those who hear it *are either for it or against it.* The preaching of the Gospel pits brother against brother, father against child, children against parents. We sense the hurt when Paul in 2 Timothy 4:10 says, *“Demas has forsaken me, because he has loved this present world.”* In fact, Jesus said to His disciples, **“All people will also hate you because of My name.”** It is always only a few who accept the Gospel testimony. The great majority rejects it and hates those who confess it. At another time, Jesus even warned, *“Yes, the time is coming when anyone who murders you will think that he is offering a service to God”* (John 16:2).

Suffering, persecution, even death - what possible reason could there be for us to resist such cruelty? Why should we not simply throw our hands up in surrender and go along with the world? Why do our vows of confirmation ask people to

² Matthew 3:12

³ 1 Timothy 4:1

remain faithful even unto death? What could be so important that we would be willing to risk even death rather than give in to the culture?

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 has come from the LORD. It is marvellous in our eyes*" (Psalm 118:22-23). This Psalm may have been written for celebrations at the time of David or for the celebrations of the second temple, and was used as thanksgiving for national deliverance. However, it was destined to find greater fulfillment when sung at the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem⁴ and when He Himself referred to it regarding His death and resurrection.⁵

The Temple authorities rejected this Stone with extreme prejudice. They arrested Him and used political pressure to force Pontius Pilate to execute Him on a cross. 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 that our sin had earned. It was the end of death's reign in this world. For 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, Jesus Christ, is 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. Jesus said, "**he who endures to the end will be saved.**" The one who endures to the end is the one whose faith in Jesus Christ endures. That one who believes that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour from sin is the one who endures to the end and will be saved.

Jesus encourages us to avoid false teaching and to endure persecution because these things only last a short time - His salvation endures forever.

All things on this earth come to an end. Today's Gospel talks of the beautiful buildings of the temple. They are no longer there. 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, while those who had endured in the one true faith to the end will be saved. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord our God, we praise You because You are the Rock of our salvation. You control the forces of nature in Your creation. Your name is holy; from one generation to another. You show mercy to those who trust and fear You. You bring down mighty kings from their thrones, and lift up the lowly. You fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away with empty hands. We thank and praise You that You have rescued us from the power of darkness, and brought us safely into the kingdom of Your dear Son. By His death You have set us free from our sins; by His resurrection You have given us the sure hope of eternal life with You.

Increase the power of the Holy Spirit in us, that we may be able to escape from the corruption of this world, and avoid Your righteous wrath, that we may live as people whom You have graciously enlightened, in ways that are worthy of Jesus, our Saviour. Grant that, through Your Word, we may grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, know Your will better, and live as You desire. Use the difficulties in our lives to strengthen our faith and love. Make us wiser and more patient, and rich in brotherly kindness and compassion. Fill our hearts with constant awareness of Your generous love, that, as children of light, we may praise You through our lives.

Arouse Your Church, O Lord, that it may remember Your continual goodness. Cleanse, strengthen, and guide it, that it may indeed be Your holy people, as lights that shine in this world's darkness. Give it pastors who are faithful shepherds of Your flock. Put Your Word on their lips, that truth may triumph, and new life may increase among us.

Bless the preaching of the Gospel, that it may bear fruit and spread rapidly throughout the world. Move more and more to turn from their idolatry, rebellion, love of pleasure, and every other evil, and to look to Jesus Christ for life and light.

Look in compassion on the nations of the world. Exert Your gracious power in our land, that we may obey Your voice. Correct what is wrong in our society, and keep us safe from our enemies. Give our leaders wisdom and courage to rule justly, to uphold good and put down the evil, so that true worship and godliness may flourish. Bless our homes. Give all

⁴ John 12:13

⁵ Matthew 21:42-44

parents grace to lead their children to Jesus by the example of their own faith and life. Keep our homes free of all strife and conflict.

We ask for Your mercy for all who are sick and in need. Support them with Your strength, and deliver them by Your goodness, that they may rejoice in Your fatherly wisdom and care.

Grant that, equipped with the armour that You supply, we may be ready for the coming day of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it may not overtake us like a thief in the night. Grant that we may finally share in Your eternal kingdom of light, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

25th Sunday after Pentecost

Daniel 12:1-3

¹ “At that time **Michael, the great prince**, who stands to protect the descendants of your people, will rise up. **There will be a time of distress unlike any that has occurred since** there has been a nation **until that time**. Nevertheless, at that time each one of your people who is found written in the book will be rescued. ² Many of those who are asleep in the land of dust will wake up, **some to everlasting life** and **others** to shame and **everlasting** abhorrence. ³ Moreover, those who have insight **will shine like** the bright dome of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.

Hebrews 10:11-25

¹¹ Every priest stands ministering every day, and repeatedly offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² However, when this Priest had offered one sacrifice for sins, which is good for ever, **He sat down at the right hand of God**. ¹³ Since that time, He is waiting for **His enemies to be made a footstool for His feet**. ¹⁴ For by one offering He has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy. ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also witnesses to us. For, after He has said, ¹⁶ “**This is the Covenant that I shall make with them after those days,**” says the Lord: **‘I shall put My Laws on their hearts and write them on their minds,’** ¹⁷ He then adds: **‘I shall certainly not remember their sins and their lawless deeds any more.’** ¹⁸ Where these have been forgiven, there is also no offering for sin any more. ¹⁹ Therefore, fellow-Christians, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new, living way that He has opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His body, ²¹ and since we have **a High Priest over the house of God**, ²² let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith! For our hearts have been sprinkled to take away guilty consciences, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. ²³ Let us cling to the confession of our hope without wavering! For He who has made the promise is faithful.

²⁴ Let us also consider how we may stimulate one another to love and to do good works! ²⁵ Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as some are regularly doing, but let us continue to encourage one another, and so much more as you see the day approaching!

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