

# ENDURANCE

Mark 13:1-13

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

November 17, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 13, verses 1 through 13. In this gospel lesson, Jesus prophecies of the destruction of the temple, and not only that, but even the end of the world. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 13, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" <sup>2</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

<sup>3</sup> And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup> "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" <sup>5</sup> And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup> And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>8</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

<sup>9</sup> "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. <sup>10</sup> And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. <sup>11</sup> And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup> And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. <sup>13</sup> And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Dear Eberley, Sonja, Dahlia, and Winfred,

Today you are baptized into Jesus Christ. And this is good. This is very good. God the Father has adopted you as his own children. He has united you with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. He has forgiven your sins. He has given you his Holy Spirit. This is all very good. And the same is true for all of you who are baptized into Jesus.

But it does not mean your life will be easy. In fact, it may be more difficult, because you belong to Christ. This world may be a difficult place for you. And that's okay, because this world is passing away, and you belong to another world. You belong to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Which means you also belong to their new creation.

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It's interesting to observe what things Jesus cares about. More than just interesting, it's enlightening. And it helps us to reorient the things we care about. We should desire the same things Jesus desires. In this gospel lesson, there's a contrast between the things the disciples care about and the things Jesus cares about.

It starts with Jesus and his disciples leaving the temple. Now this is during Holy Week. It's just a few days before Jesus would be arrested, condemned, and crucified. So Jesus was in Jerusalem with his disciples for the Feast of Passover. And he spent some of his time that week at the temple, teaching.

As they were leaving the temple one day, one of the disciples remarked to him how wonderful the temple was. And the temple was a magnificent building. There was gold everywhere you looked, and it was built with enormous and marvelous stones.

I suppose they just don't make things like they used to. You hear people say that all the time. And it's kind of a cliché, but there's some truth to it. Today we have big, powerful machines that could lift heavy stones, but we don't usually build that way anymore. But in those days, if there was something that was really worth building, they spared no expense. They invested their wealth and their time into it. And they did things the hard way. It's actually hard to believe some of the descriptions of the temple. The Jewish historian Josephus said that some of the stones were over sixty feet long, seven feet high, and nine feet wide (*The Jewish War*, 5.224). A stone that size would weigh about three hundred tons. And I don't know if he was telling the truth. It doesn't seem possible to move a stone that large, even with modern machinery. So he may have been embellishing a bit. But even if he was, there had to be something magnificent to exaggerate in the first place. It's obvious to see that the temple was the pride of the Jewish people.

At this point in history, the renovation of the temple had been going on for about fifty years. The first temple was built by King Solomon around 960 BC (1 Kings 6). And he poured his great wealth into it. But that temple was destroyed less than four hundred years later in 587 BC by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon (2 Chr, 36:19). And the Israelites rebuilt it about seventy years later, completing it around 516 BC. But they no longer had the wealth Solomon had, so it lacked the grandeur of the first temple (Ezra 3:12). So around 20 BC, when this second temple was about 500 years old, King Herod undertook a massive renovation of it. King Herod wasn't really a pious man, but he wanted to be remembered, so he undertook this project. Herod was never the sovereign King of Israel; he was a puppet ruler for Rome. And he died long before the project was completed. But he wanted to be remembered as the greatest king since Solomon. To him, the temple project was more of a monument to his own greatness than it was a house of worship. So he commissioned the renovation of the temple. The concept was not to tear it down and replace it—then the Jews would have no temple while they waited—but to rebuild it piece by piece while it was still in use. The Jews collected taxes for the temple project. And people donated to it as well. Last week in the gospel lesson we heard about a poor widow who put in two small coins. That was likely for the temple.

So the temple was the treasure of Israel. It was the emblem of their national and religious identity. Nothing in all of Israel was more important than the temple, and it was the thing the Jews took pride in. And as the work of renovation was ongoing, every time Jews from Galilee came to Jerusalem, they would see the temple even more marvelous than it was the last time. It was the pride of Israel. I was trying to think of what we have in our day that would compare to it, but there really isn't anything. I don't know if there's anything in the world that would rival that kind of national and religious pride.

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And Jesus' disciples were stricken with the temple. Which makes it stand out as really kind of strange when Jesus seems so nonchalant about its destruction. He says, **“Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down”** (13:2). He prophesies the destruction of the temple. And that prophecy came to pass about forty years later in 70 AD. Now we can't read his tone to tell exactly how he feels about it, but he doesn't lament it. The temple is not what really concerns him.

It concerned the disciples. Peter, James, John, and Andrew wanted to know more about it. But Jesus' concern was for them. The building was just a building. It would be destroyed, and that would be okay. But their eternal souls are what really matters. So when they ask for more detail about the temple being destroyed, Jesus kind of changes the subject and says, **“See that no one leads you astray”** (13:5), and, **“Be on your guard”** (13:9), and, **“The one who endures to the end will be saved”** (13:13).

This is the contrast between what those disciples cared about and what Jesus cares about. They were concerned about earthly things. Even the temple was an earthly thing. It was, at that time, the closest an earthly thing could be to a heavenly thing, because it was a copy of the true things in heaven. But it was still just a copy. And it was still an earthly thing. But Jesus cares about the things that will last forever. He cares about your eternal soul.

So when he foretells of disasters, like the destruction of the temple, wars, earthquakes, and famines, his great concern is not in protecting the temple. His concern is not with peace on earth. It's not with constructing earthquake proof buildings. It's not even with feeding the hungry when a famine comes. Pursuing peace, protecting property, and feeding the hungry are obviously good things. But Jesus' great concern is your eternal soul.

So he warns us to beware of false teachers. False doctrine threatens the soul. We could all starve to death, and that would be okay, because Jesus would raise our bodies and feed us forever. But if one of us falls away from the faith, that would be a tragedy. So Jesus says, **“Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray”** (13:6).

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Sometimes people ask, “Is it possible for a Christian to fall away from the faith?” The answer is, “Yes.” Our Calvinist friends teach that it's not possible. You've maybe heard their teaching before. They say, “Once saved, always saved.” They're reasoning is that God is sovereign and he loves his children, which is true. But they conclude from that that God would never allow one of his beloved children to fall away. Now, there is a great comfort in God's protective care. It really is the Holy Spirit who preserves us in the true faith. Without the Holy Spirit, we would all fall away, and very quickly. When our hearts are troubled, when we fear that we are weak, we can and should take great comfort that Jesus is still our Good Shepherd and he has sent his Holy Spirit to strengthen and preserve us in the true faith. There is a real gospel comfort there. But Scripture also warns us about falling away from the faith. It warns us about becoming complacent. It warns us about following false teachers. And more than just warning us about it, it explicitly teaches that it is possible to fall away. In the parable of the sower, Jesus speaks of those who, like seed on rocky ground, sprang up to life. They had a real, living faith. But, like sun scorching a plant with no roots, tribulation and persecution comes and they fall away (Mark 4:5-6, 16-17). Or Hebrews 6 speaks of those “who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit ... and then have fallen away” (6:4, 6). And in the verses we read this morning from chapter 10, “If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26). And the specific sin Hebrews speaks of there wasn't something that we think of as really terrible, like murder or adultery. It was simply

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skipping church, which we might not think of as a big thing, but is actually very dangerous to our souls, because we cut ourselves off from the means the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen and preserve us. And in some of Paul's letters, he mentions, by name, certain individuals who had "made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17). It is possible to fall away. Now, the gospel side of it is that our Lord Jesus protects us. But one of the ways he protects us is by warning us, **"Be on your guard."**

Jesus warns us to beware of false teachers. So there are times in sermons or Bible studies, when I might warn you about some false teaching. And you might think, *Why do we have to be so critical?* And I try not to be overly critical, but there are times when we must be critical, even of other Christians if there is some poison in their teaching.

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And Jesus especially warns his disciples about persecution. **"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them"** (13:9). Our Lord Jesus was rejected by those he came to save. They condemned him and crucified him. And what was his crime? He healed the sick, raised the dead, and forgave sins. And if they did this to our Lord, we should expect the world to treat us in the same way. So Jesus warns his disciples about it. But here's the interesting thing: it's not for the reasons that we might think. He does not warn them so that they can evade arrest. And it's not so that they can try to protect their First Amendment rights. He actually wants them to get arrested. That's the point. Because if they get arrested for preaching the Gospel, they get to stand in front of governors and kings to bear witness about Jesus in front of them. He does not warn them so that they can avoid persecution. That's not Jesus' will. He doesn't care about that, and we shouldn't either. What he cares about is our faith being strengthened so that we can endure persecution. That's why he warns his disciples, and that's why this is recorded for us to hear as well.

It's not just the twelve apostles who were persecuted, but many Christians throughout history have endured it. And we may too. The Gospel divides nations. It even divides families. Brother against brother, fathers against children, and children against fathers (13:12). In some cases, family members have turned over their believing relatives to be killed. It sounds too extreme, like no one would ever do that, but Jesus' words have come to pass over and over again. He warns us so that we can endure.

This endurance, how could we have this kind of endurance? It's not by looking within ourselves. It's not by working up the strength in our hearts. It's by looking to Christ, and especially by looking to his future promise. He promises that, **"The one who endures to the end will be saved."** That is, when he appears again, he will save those who have been eagerly waiting for his return. The afflictions we face in this life are temporary. But his salvation is eternal. He promises us that, at his return, we will be raised from our graves and transformed after his perfect image to live in perfection forever. So when we experience persecution or tribulation in this life, we must fix our eyes on Jesus and his promises. We look to his cross as evidence that he has purchased us as his own. We look to his resurrection as evidence that he will raise us from the dead. And we look ahead to his return in glory to finally save us from this world of sorrow.

We look around us, and we see signs of the end all the time. It seems that as soon as one war ends, another begins. Or there are multiple wars going on at once. And there are earthquakes famines, hurricanes, floods, and all the kinds of disasters. And they keep coming, one after another. Some people say that it's our fault, and they look to government to solve it. And I don't know if they're right or not. Think what you will about all of that. But the Christian's first

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thought should be that all of these things are signs of the end. It's not just the end of the temple that Jesus was talking about, but the end of this world. So he tells us about these signs of the end.

The point of the signs is not so that we can map it out. We can't. He doesn't tell us when the end will be, and it's impossible for us to figure it out. The point of the signs is to remind us that the end is certain, and Jesus' appearance is a guarantee. When we see all these signs, we should say to ourselves, "This world is not the way it is supposed to be, and God will not let it remain like this." We can see God's majesty in parts of creation. But we also see signs of corruption. It's obvious that the universe does not work exactly as it should. So we should be reminded of this, and we should take great comfort in this truth: our God will not allow the world to remain in imperfection forever. His perfect and eternal will is that we would live in a world where righteousness dwells, where there is no disaster, where there is no death, no hunger, no sin, no pain, and no tears. And if that is his will, he will bring it to pass. In this life we will have tribulation, **"But the one who endures to the end will be saved."**

Jesus has purchased you with his holy and precious blood. He will not turn around and abandon you to destruction or decay. But his promise is that he will appear again. If we die before his reappearance, he will raise our bodies. Then he will transform us into perfection, and bring us into his new creation. In the meantime, things might be hard, but it will be so worth it in the end, because Jesus will deliver all who trust in him. Amen.

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He who testifies to these things says, **"Surely I am coming soon."** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)