

Sermon Mark 13 1 13 25<sup>th</sup> S af Pentecost Series B

Sermon: 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Mark 13:1-13 (v. 4)

Theme: What about our future ?

Goal: To be alert! God prepares us for the salvation in Christ!

Dear Friends in Christ,

Introduction: The disciples were impressed by the massive stones of the temple's building! Herod the Great had done a great job. The splendor of the temple was recognized by Romans and by Jews. Even now the only remains from that building, the Wailing Wall, impresses us by its height and by the size of its stones.

Jesus is not impressed by the massive stones and by the magnificent building. I like to say: Stones and bricks don't go to heaven. Buildings are not guarantee of safety or of salvation (in the spiritual concept). Jesus is interested in the faithfulness of the disciples and in God's Kingdom. He directs the eyes of the disciples towards a higher goal, not just to earthly splendors, which fade away.

Answering the question of the disciples, Jesus speaks about two different matters at the same time: he speaks about the destruction of the temple and about the end of all things. Sometimes it's difficult to visualize when He is talking about one event or about the other event. Anyway, the destruction of the temple by the Romans in the year 70 AD and what happened before and after the destruction is a prefiguration of the end of the world. The prophecy of the destruction of the temple was accomplished; this means that we have to be aware of the end of all things, that will happen certainly someday. When?

We are always curious and anxious about our future. Horoscopes and fortune-tellers are popular among many people. Jesus warns us not to be deceived about our future, but to be prepared for a good future: “He who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

## I – Watch out

Answering the question of the disciples, “When will these things happen? What will be the signs that they are all about to be fulfilled?”, Jesus pointed to several signs. Some are external signs in the world history; and some are internal signs specific to the church. Let us first consider the external signs.

How many religions are there in the world? Each one assures the way to a better life, giving guidelines to this life to their followers and making promises for this and for the other life. Which religion is the right one? Jesus said, “Watch out that no one deceives you”. From all the religions in the world, Christianity is the only one which has a Living Leader: The resurrected Christ. But even inside Christianity as well we need to watch out not to be deceived; because many use the name of Jesus to teach their own ways, contrary to the gracious and free promises of Christ. “He who stands firm to the end will be saved.” This means: To hold to Christ alone in true faith, believing that He forgives our sins because He paid for them on the cross.

The second set of external signs has to do with wars: “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” *Although these signs began in the first century, those living in the twenty-first century are no strangers to any of them. Ethnic clashes, the internal breakdown of law and order, cross-border wars, massive displacements of people as refugees...are rife* (ABC 1193). Wars have taken place ever since the beginning of the human history. But they are increasing rapidly. We hear about several countries facing wars in the media daily. They are all signs that “the temple and the stones” are not permanent; the current structure we have is temporary and can be destroyed by wars, as a foreshadow of the last judgment.

The third set of external signs has to do with natural catastrophes:

“There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.”

Earthquakes and famine have happened throughout the history of humankind as well. But they are increasing in an alarming way! In spite of all the science, technology and relief efforts, the number of people who die of famine and deceases has increased startlingly.

“These are the beginning of birth pains,” said Jesus.

## II – Be on guard

The internal signs Jesus pointed out are related to the situation of the church: Persecution because of the faith, and betrayal among the same family because of the Christian faith. The first Christians suffered a lot of persecutions from the Jews and from the Romans. The Book of Acts tells us about how much the Apostles and the Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted and some were killed; and how much the Apostle Paul suffered on behalf of the Gospel. The History tells us about the persecution of the Christians in Rome and how many were burned alive, tied up on a pole or on a cross.

But statistic shows that more Christians were persecuted and killed because of their faith in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century than during all the previous centuries! The Communism, Islamism, Hinduism, Buddhism are not giving chance to the Christians in many countries.

I received an e-mail this week from an American missionary friend of mine who has worked with his wife among Native Indians in the Amazon Forest for more than 30 years. The Indians who became Christians are now being despised by their tribe and are loosing their rights as part of the clan. The missionary asks for prayer. - We know lots of similar stories about new Christians converted from Judaism or from the Muslims and other religions as well.

A more subtle persecution happens in many so called “Christian Countries”. The few church goers who remain are despised by their families and friends. Fashion is not to go to the church anymore and

not to be restricted by the church rules. Secularism rules governments, schools and families. And the churches are empty.

Conclusion: Jesus doesn't want to scare us with this teaching, but to prevent: “Watch out... don't be deceived...be on guard... stand firm to the end.” And He promises His Holy Spirit to be with us in the difficult time and the eternal life. He Himself faced the strongest and biggest persecution and was hung on the cross. By His resurrection, He guarantees victory and life to all who believe in Him. Even if we suffer the effects of wars, catastrophes, persecutions, even if we are despised by others because of our faith and Christian life, Jesus stands at our side to help us and He says: Don't be afraid. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

God used the persecution of the Apostles for a good goal: To spread the Gospel. Even the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple served this purpose. The disciples couldn't stay in Jerusalem forever. *The destruction of the temple means no less than the destruction of the Levitical covenant (of the OT)*(Series B 266). A new era was to begin after Jesus' resurrection. *Christians will witness to Jesus Christ everywhere, because “the Gospel must first be preached to all nations”* (Series B 267). We are part of God's plan to spread the Gospel to all nations. We cannot just be seated inside the security and comfort of our temple, our church. We have to stand up and to go out and share the Gospel with our family and with others as well. We are still the mouth of God to speak about His love. The Holy Spirit touches the hearts to bring them to Christ.

*The destruction of the temple was the first great sign. Suffering will continue until the Gospel has been preached to all nations. Then the end will come. “He who stands firm to the end will be saved.”* (Series B 267). May God preserve us in His grace and in the true faith in Jesus till the end, when we will be united with all the Saints and blessed ones who are enjoying God's presence in heaven. Amen.

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