

## THE WAY AHEAD (Mk. 13:1-13)

Mk. 13:1 And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! <sup>2</sup> And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. <sup>3</sup> And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against [*opposite, facing*] the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup> Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled? <sup>5</sup> And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you: <sup>6</sup> For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. <sup>7</sup> And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. <sup>8</sup> For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers [*various, different*] places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows. <sup>9</sup> But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony [*witnesses*] against them. <sup>10</sup> And the gospel must first be published [*κηρύσσω, heralded, preached*] among all nations. <sup>11</sup> But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up [*arrest and bring you to trial*], take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate [*don't worry beforehand*]: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. <sup>12</sup> Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. <sup>13</sup> And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

When we come to a passage speaking about the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, there are a few tendencies, - one is to dismiss it as inflated imagination, another is to be negative and concentrate on all the bad things around us. Another is to retreat into our little fortresses and pretend the state of the world has nothing to do with us. Well, let's begin by looking at the positives relating to our Saviour's return ... First of all, Jesus knows what is ahead. Secondly, He is in control. Thirdly, He is watching over us. Fourthly, His people will neither be silenced nor defeated. Fifthly, the Gospel will be preached worldwide.

The tone of this chapter is that Christ will reign. ... We know Who wins, and we are on His side! ... That is what we must always keep in view because that is not how it seems when we look around us. ... There are many negatives ... People are bored with Christianity, - they reckon it's dying, and they are not interested. I guarantee you if you ask your neighbour what they believe, it would bear little resemblance to the Gospel. Of course, unbelief has always been an obstacle for the Church, - from the beginning, - but we have more than unbelief nowadays for we have outright contempt towards anything the Church stands for.

... And it is not a pretty picture the Lord Jesus draws concerning the end times for He prophesied wars, rumours of wars, famines, earthquakes and multiple disasters. You would think because humanity has been around for a long time, it would have worked out how to best deal with these issues ... but, instead, it is getting worse. ... On one hand, we have never had it so good, we have never had as much, - we have good homes, we have good cars, we have so many excellent facilities our grandparents would never have dreamt of ... But, on the other hand, neither could our grandparents have imagined the moral decline which is plundering our society. Truth has been polluted, religion is contaminated, the Ten Commandments discarded ... and the world is nothing like how God created it at the beginning ... It is a dangerous place.

This chapter marks the end of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus, and He is speaking to His disciples about the things to come. ... He has departed from the temple, and Peter, Andrew, James, and John, - the first disciples He called, - were admiring its magnificence. They were excited for they believed Jesus would soon present Himself as the Messiah, in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. They believed He was ready to establish His Kingdom, expel the Romans, and rule from Mount Zion. ... That is what they were expecting! And then Jesus confounded their dreams by telling them the beautiful temple would soon be destroyed. ... Their mood changed drastically!

Mark gives a synopsis, - filled out by Matthew and Luke, - but basically, they all begin with Jesus prophesying the continuation of disastrous conditions which have been a feature of life on this planet since the Fall. He also told them His followers would be persecuted and martyred, and pretend 'messiahs' would deceive and delude many. This would escalate to unprecedented proportions.

This opening four verses of this chapter prophesies the destruction of the temple. Then v.5-13 reveal a general period of destruction and trouble. The situation *gravely* deteriorates in v. 14-23. And from v.24 onwards, Mark speaks about Christ's second coming. ... Listen to what Jesus told His disciples.

He is sitting on the Mount of Olives, and He is looking across to the Temple, on Mount Zion. He is on His way back to where He was staying, in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. But inside that temple was apostasy and corruption. Jesus said it would come crumbling down, and the disciples were intrigued, so they asked, **Mt. 24:3** *Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*

Having first spoken about the *destruction*, He went on to prophesy the *deception*, - a relentless wave of 'spiritual fraudery' when instead of believing the truth the people were brought up to believe, they would formulate their own erroneous beliefs. They would move so far from what they had been taught, and they would not even be ashamed! They would utterly reject God, and His true worship.

Throughout Scripture, though, God always keeps a faithful 'remnant', regardless of how the majority abandons Him. They are determined to be true to the Word of God, as in similar times during Isaiah's ministry, **Is. 8:20** *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. ... It does not matter who is teaching the error, or how many of them there are ... if the true proclamation of the Word of God is their not guide, avoid them!*

Each of us are born with a spiritual conscience, - we know what is right and wrong. We also know there is something inside us which *knows* there is a God, even if many try to deny it. And then when they do explore, they are intent in searching in wrong places and they become caught in the spiritual webs of deceit by the teachings of those who purport to uphold God's Word, but they deny Him ... and many are ensnared without even realising it. They are given such promises of great improvements in their lifestyle and circumstances, as if God is some kind of 'genie' ... and it is all about how God serves *them* rather than how *they* serve God, and their message *is so attractive and alluring* ... Beware, **Is. 8:20** *if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

Here is how they work, **Mk. 13:22** *false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.* They cannot lead the elect astray, but they will *seduce* those who have a flimsy 'on/off' faith, - they are 'Christians' when it suits ... there is a 'lightness' to how they believe. It's only 'skin-deep', for true faith has never made its way through to the heart.

We can easily find false christs and false prophets on the internet, but there are also many occupying today's pulpits. There are many trying to entice our young people ... "Come and have a good time with Jesus. Here's how easy it is, and you can fit it into what you are doing already" ... instead of telling them what they *need* to hear from God's Word. Older folk are 'in the firing line' too, because we can become so stagnant and arrogant we obstruct the message by adding to it. ... And this is where Satan is clever for he can get us to be so Pharisaical, by adding our 'bits and pieces', which Jesus never included, and we do harm to the Gospel

So, be sure of this ... Any gospel preached anywhere which does not have Jesus Christ as the sole and only Saviour and Lord is a false gospel, **Gal. 1:8** *though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* ... Any other 'gospel' will lead you to Hell, for that is where the false gospels come from. No matter how it is dressed up, have nothing to do with it for Jesus warns, **Mk. 13:5** *Take heed lest any man deceive you: <sup>6</sup> For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.* ... That is the warning He gave to these men who had been following and listening to Him everywhere for over three years!

"Oh, they will never get me" ... that is what Peter thought too. Later, though, he, - for a short time, - joined a sect which taught a person had to be circumcised and become a Jew before they could be saved, - Barnabas was also caught up with them (Gal. 2:11-13). Both Peter and Barnabas *began* with the truth, but they were drawn away temporarily, so Peter speaks with authority when he warns, **II Peter 3:17** *beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness* ... **II Peter 1:1** *give diligence to make your calling and election sure* ... he is

writing from experience! So, even the elect cannot afford to take false doctrine for granted! And it was only God's grace that restored Peter and Barnabas. ... None of us can afford to think any higher of ourselves than we ought!

Outside the glorious temple Jesus warns His disciples, - Peter being one of them, - about *destruction, deception* and then *disaster*, **Mk. 13:7** And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. **8** For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows. ... If humanity cannot live at peace with itself, disaster is inevitable. We seem to have a death-wish. The world talks about wanting harmony and peace, but where is the evidence it *really* wants it?

Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus told His disciples not to be frightened when these things increase! Wars all over the world are claiming more lives at a ridiculous rate, and we have become numb to the statistics, - they don't mean the same to us anymore. It seems endless, but Jesus said, *these are the beginnings of sorrows*.

He correctly prophesied the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, and there has never been peace on this earth because man has always wanted *more*, and as long as somebody else has it, he's prepared to *destroy* to take it for himself. And the more sophisticated, the more devastating man's greed fuels the conflicts. ... This is what is happening ... and Jesus said, *these are the beginnings of sorrows*. ... And there is no indication, - no hope, - of men trying to work it out peacefully, for the good of mankind.

Now, what about being a Christian surrounded by all this? How does it, - how will it, - impact on God's people? ... Jesus explains, **Mk. 13:9** But take heed to yourselves ... The formula 'Take heed' is used over sixty-five times in Scripture, and four time in this chapter, v.5,9,23,33 ... at its beginning and end ... But take heed to yourselves for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. Earlier He had told them, **Mt. 10:16** I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. ... It won't get easier being a Christian, - stand up for what God teaches in His Word and you will find that out! You will become a pariah, for that is what Jesus became. To His disciples He said, **Jn. 15:18** If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. **19** If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

You won't change it for **James 4:4** the friendship of the world is enmity with God, - you are either a Christian or you're not, you are either following Christ or you're not.

You cannot serve both, for it is either one or the other. ... Which is worth the most, - following Christ, or forsaking Him? Eternity hinges upon the answer.

The world put Jesus on a cross, hoping to silence His message, because they hated Him. ... And He said that's why His followers and their message are not welcome. Everyone else can have an opinion, but when the Christian opens their mouth, they are bigots and intolerant. ... But that is how Jesus said it would be, and if it is not like that, and if everything the world says you agree with and they agree with you ... well, you are keeping the wrong company!

But with the warning of persecution comes the great promise, <sup>10</sup> *And the gospel must first be published among all nations.* ... The movement of God cannot be halted! The gates of Hell cannot prevail against it. The Gospel is being preached all over the world, even in places where they are trying to keep it out! They cannot, and they never will! ... Not even, in countries and places when someone in the family comes to Christ, and the family turns against them, - they ostracise them, put them out, or even worse ... 'honour killings', <sup>12</sup> *the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.* ... Ever since Christianity began, God's people have been hounded and persecuted, even unto death, but today it is happening more than ever, as Jesus prophesied it would.

Why would you be a Christian in such circumstances as that? It would prove how much the Lord Jesus means to you. If He didn't mean much, you would easily set Him to the one side when it doesn't suit to be identified with Him. But, if you would do that, it would call into question your salvation for, as He says, <sup>13</sup> *he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* ... You don't earn salvation by your endurance but if you love the Saviour you won't abandon Him. With His help you keep on going, no matter what comes your way. And it's the testing of your faith which produces endurance, and proves you have the real thing.

So here, in the first thirteen verses of Mk. 13, the Lord Jesus gives warning of *destruction, deception, and disaster* ... He doesn't hide the reality, but He also gives promise, and comfort, and the Heavenly hope as the prize to His Redeemed.

While we in Scotland are not at all persecuted as some Christians are in other countries, nevertheless the same conclusion Jesus brought is true for us also, <sup>13</sup> *he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* That's what He said previously, *Lk. 9:62 No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.* ... That is **the way ahead**, and I trust when our faith is tried we shall not be found wanting in our service of our Lord. Amen.