

God Judges His Church

Mark 13:14-23

Halifax & Glenholme: 6 September 2020

Introduction:

Last week in our Mark sermon series, we came to chapter 13.

- Here we have Mark's version of the Olivet Discourse where Jesus speaks to His disciples about the coming destruction of the temple at Jerusalem.

We saw how Mark begins by telling us that as Jesus left the temple, one of His disciples pointed out the magnificent stones and buildings.

- The precincts were half a kilometre in one direction and a third of kilometre in the other, with massive marble stones (40 feet by 18 by 12) adorned with gold.
- Jesus' disciple likely commented about it in response to Jesus' denouncement of the Jewish leaders, and His declaration of the judgement that was going to fall on them that would leave this house at Jerusalem desolate.

Jesus responds to this disciple with words that make it clear that this great structure will be utterly destroyed.

- In 13:2, He says: **“Do you see these great buildings? Not *one* stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”**
- They make their way to the Mount of Olives where Jesus sits facing the temple.
 - Four of His disciples ask Him about this great destruction.
 - verse 4: **“Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”**

We saw that Jesus did not answer their question directly at first.

- He knew that His disciples were constantly expecting Him to set up His kingdom of glory—the final eternal state—paradise.
 - We have seen them repeatedly asking Him about this and continuing to do so even after His resurrection.
 - He keeps telling them that following Him will involve suffering—then glory, but they keep thinking that the glory will come right away.
- When they ask Him this question about the temple's destruction, Jesus knew that they shared the view that was common in their day that the temple would stand until the end of this world, when the Messiah came and established the kingdom of glory.
 - So in their minds, the destruction of the temple meant that the kingdom of glory would immediately appear.
- So before telling them what the signs of the temple's destruction would be, Jesus first tells them that there will be a whole lot of suffering for those who follow Him—a whole lot of suffering before the kingdom of glory comes.
 - He explains that not only will there be wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, and all kinds of other troubles that are common to all men,
 - but also persecution and rejection, even by loved ones, for those who follow Him.
 - He stresses that they must not look on these hardships as signs that the end has come... for they are not!

- Rather when they see hardships looming, they must prepare themselves to endure—to look for Him, not to snatch them out of it all, but rather to give them grace and strength to stand faithfully to the end.
- It is sad to see how to this day, as soon as there are hard things in the world, Christians always start saying that it is a sure sign that Jesus is about to come back.
 - He told us that troubles are not signs that the end has come.
 - Let us instead encourage each other to seek the grace of the Lord what we might be faithful to Him to the end.

That is what we looked last week up until verse 13.

- Today, we are going to look at verses 14-23.
 - In this section, Jesus now addresses what sign will be given when the time comes for the temple to be destroyed.
 - This will not be a sign of the end of the world, but of the end of the temple.
- In the section that follows, verse 24 to the end, which we will plan to look at next week, He tells them what will happen after the temple is destroyed.
 - In short, He tells them that He will rule from the clouds (at the right hand of the Father), gathering His elect people from all over the world, and that this will go on until the end of the world—which will come without any particular sign.
 - The temple will be destroyed in the present generation, and there will be a sign for that (which I will show you in a moment); but the end of the world and the coming of the kingdom of glory will be at some unknown time still future to us.
- So today, we will look at the end of the temple.
 - Next week at the time from the end of the temple (in 70 AD) until the end of the world—nobody knows when.

Give attention now to the reading of the word.

- Our text is Mark 13:14-23, but I am going to read on to 33 to give you the context.
- This is the Word of God (Mk 13:1):

Mark 13:1-37: Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*”² And Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not *one* stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately,⁴ “Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”⁵ And Jesus, answering them, began to say: “Take heed that no one deceives you.⁶ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am *He,*’ and

will deceive many.⁷ But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for *such things* must happen, but the end *is not yet.*⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.⁹ But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testi-mony to them.¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.¹¹ But when they arrest *you* and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or

premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. ¹⁴ So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. ¹⁶ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁷ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ¹⁸ And pray that your flight may not be in winter. ¹⁹ For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. ²⁰ And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. ²¹ Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or, 'Look, *He is*

there!' do not believe it. ²² For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand. ²⁴ But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. ²⁸ Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! ³⁰ Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. ³² But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is."

May the Lord bless His Word to our understanding and strengthening.

You can see the flow of Jesus' discourse.

- In verse 5-13, He tells them that all the wars and troubles and persecutions are NOT signs of the end of the world and the coming of the kingdom of glory.
- In verse 14, He tells of the abomination of desolation that they will see standing where it ought not that will be a sign for them to flee from Judea as fast as they can.
 - In verses 15-18 He stresses that they must not delay once they see this abomination of desolation, but get away as fast as they can.
 - Because, as He says in verse 19-20, a time of terrible tribulation is coming that would destroy even the elect if He did not shorten it.
 - He advises them to be sure that they don't follow any who claim to be Christ at that time. Instead, they must run for the hills (21-23).
- Clearly, He is not speaking of the end of the world here, because He tells them to run for safety—and then in verse 24, He tells them what will happen after this great tribulation.

- I don't have time to go into the details, but in short He uses Old Testament language that was used again and again to refer to the overthrow of the existing order—the overthrow of kingdoms symbolised by changes in the sun and the moon and the stars.
- And then in verse 26, He says that they will see the Son of Man come in the clouds, more Old Testament imagery that speaks not of His Parousia—His bodily return at the end—but of His coming to rule over the nations under the gospel.
 - He comes as the one reigning in heaven to establish His reign on earth.
 - They see Him reigning, but not bodily present, as (v. 27) He sends out His messengers to gather His elect people to Him from the nations—this is the preaching of the gospel.
- The situation here is that His reign will be evident among the nations when the temple is destroyed and He is worshipped in all parts of the world.
 - In verse 28-30, He tells them that the termination of temple worship that will signify the beginning of His worship among the nations will occur in their generation—while some of their contemporaries are still alive.
- And then in verse 31, He says that heaven and earth will pass way, but that His words will not pass away...
 - In verse 32, He begins to speak of the very end.
 - Up until now, He has been speaking of “those days” in the plural, but in verse 32, He speaks of “that day,” which is the day of end when His kingdom of glory will come.
 - He says that the time of that day is not one that can be discerned—it is not even known to the angels or to Him—but only to the Father.
 - It is not like the destruction of the temple which will be indicated by the abomination of desolation.

And now let's turn to look at what we can learn from this passage.

I. First, see here the complete cessation of Old Testament worship.

- A. This is shown by Jesus' prophecy that they will see **“the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing where it ought not.”**
 1. Daniel wrote of this “abomination of desolation” several times in his book.
 - The words themselves refer to something offensive that desecrates the holy temple so that it cannot be used until it is consecrated all over again.
 - The abomination of desolation is that defiling thing that stands in the holy place where it ought not to stand.
 2. Daniel wrote of it in chapter 9, which we read earlier.
 - Turn there and take a look.
 - In Daniel 9:24, Daniel prophesies that within 490 years (70 weeks or sevens of years), God's redemptive work that would bring in everlasting righteousness would be completed—

- It says: (9:24): **Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.**
 - Sin would be atoned and righteousness brought in so that sacrifices would not be needed—prophecy would be sealed up—God’s redemptive revelation finished...
 - And the Most Holy one would be anointed—‘Christ’ or ‘Messiah’ means anointed one—He was anointed at His baptism.
- Daniel started his clock with the command to rebuild Jerusalem—as verse 25 explains:
 - **“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem [One such decree was made in 457 BC] until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [483 years—which brings us to 26 AD when Christ was baptised and anointed]; the street shall be built again, and the wall [after the 49 years], even in troublesome times.**
- Daniel explains that after He is anointed, the Messiah will be cut off, a reference to His crucifixion.
 - **26 “And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; [not for His own offenses] and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. [This prince is the Roman prince who came after Messiah was cut off—Daniel does not give the time of this, but we know that the Romans came in 67 AD and destroyed the temple in 70 AD. Daniel goes on to say:] The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.**
 - These “desolations” are those things which defile the temple. Jesus speaks of the abomination of desolation, which likely refers to the desolation that was brought by Zealots in 67-68 AD when they took over the temple after winning a victory against the Romans.
- Lane gives the following summary:
 - “During this period the Zealots moved into and occupied the temple area (*War* IV. iii. 7), allowed persons who had committed crimes to roam about freely in the Holy of Holies (*War* IV. iii. 10), and perpetrated murder within the temple itself (*War* IV. v. 4). These acts of sacrilege were climaxed in the winter of 67-68 by the farcical investiture of the clown Phanni as high priest (*War* IV. iii. 6-8). It was in response to this specific action that the retired high priest Ananus, with tears, lamented: “It would have been far better for me to have died before I had seen the house of God laden with such abominations and its unapproachable and hallowed places crowded with the feet of murderers” (*War* IV. iii. 10). Jewish Christians who had met in the porches of the Temple from the earliest days would have found this spectacle no less offensive. It seems probable that they recognised in

Phanni “the appalling sacrilege usurping a position which is not his,” consigning the Temple to destruction. In response to Jesus’ warning they fled to Pella.” Eusebius tells us that they went to Pella.

- Daniel says a bit more about all this in 9:27:
 - **Then he (the Messiah) shall confirm a covenant with many for one week** [a seven year period—in which Jesus made His covenant, was crucified, and then His disciples went out to minister to the Jews]; **but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering** [His crucifixion itself ended sacrifice and offering]. **And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate** [The temple was not desecrated and destroyed until the time when the abomination of desolation was set up which actually ended sacrifices followed by the destruction of the temple which made it impossible to continue them], **even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.”**
- So to summarise what Daniel says about the abomination of desolation:
 - First, he said that it would put an end to sacrifice and offering,
 - Second, he said that it would do this after the Messiah came,
 - Third, he said that the Messiah would come sixty-nine weeks (sevens) of years after the command to restore and to build.

3. People today may not know what Jesus was talking about, but His disciples would have been very familiar with this.

- In fact, they had seen an abomination of desolation in 167 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek who tried to turn the Jews into Greeks, set up an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offering in the temple.
- The Jews saw this as a foreshadowing of the abomination of desolation that Daniel wrote about that would put a definitive end to worship at the temple after the Messiah came.
- So for the disciples, the abomination of desolation spoke of the time when the temple worship would end and the Messiah would reign.

B. And they were largely correct about that, for that is what Daniel said.

1. What the disciples of Jesus did not understand was that the Messiah would reign at the right of the Father for many years until His second coming.

- This is the period we are in now when Jesus comes not in person, but in the clouds with great power and glory (as it says in Mark 13:26) to send forth His messengers (His angels) with power to gather His elect from the four corners of the earth. We will look at more about that next week.

2. But the point is, it was understood that the Messiah would end the need for sacrifice and offering because He would bring in everlasting righteousness...

- And that after He did, the temple would be desecrated and then destroyed putting a final end to worship in that way.

C. How we should rejoice in what the Lord has done as is reflected by this change in worship!

1. Until Jesus came, there was only a promise that the Messiah would do what was required to make sacrifices for sin unnecessary.
 - But until He came, those sacrifices and all that was associated with them was required of God's worshippers. They had to go up to the temple at Jerusalem because that was the place God appointed for these sacrifices to be offered.
 - They had to purify themselves and keep themselves for ceremonial defilement. Most of all, they did not have the comfort of seeing God actually take away their sins.
2. Now we have seen what God has done to take away our sins.
 - We have the certainty of full acceptance through the blood of Jesus Christ, His only Son, shed for the remission of our sins.
 - We rest in His righteousness and in His finished work and in the promise that God made to all who believe of full forgiveness and reconciliation.
 - We come to God knowing that in Christ, we are not condemned.
3. God has confirmed His testimony to us in many ways.
 - But the way we see here in Mark 13 is by fulfilling the prophecies of Daniel that when sin had been finished and Christ's redemptive work complete,
 - He would bring about an end to sacrifice and offering, not only by Jesus' work which makes it obsolete, but by the desecration of the temple followed by its destruction.
 - The Old Covenant way of worship is terminated because Christ has fulfilled all that God requires for us sinners to be reconciled to God forever.
 - Our Lord is so kind to us!
 - He loves to make His salvation sure to all of us who are looking to Christ.
 - How could the Jews have missed this?
 - We are told—it was because God blinded them and hardened their hearts because of their wickedness.

TRANS> And that brings us to the second thing you should see in our text.

II. Second, see here that the church can become the object of God's most severe wrath and judgment.

- A. Our Lord Jesus describes here the most severe judgment of all and it is aimed at His church!
 1. Is this not so?
 - He is talking about judgment that is going to fall on those who worship at the temple—on those who live in Judea, the land that He gave to Israel, the sons of Abraham.
 - He tells His disciples to flee to the mountains when they see the abomination of desolation in the temple—this thing that desecrated the temple...
 - And why should His disciples flee?

- Because of the terrible judgement that will fall on His church—the Old Testament church.
 - Look at verse 19: **“For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.”**
 - Jesus is talking about the judgement that fell upon His people from 67 to 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed.
 - Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes it with very similar words to the ones that Jesus uses in verse 19.
- Make no mistake about it.
- This harshest of judgements does not fall on the Romans or the Greeks... it does not fall on those who are outside the church.
 - It falls on Israel, God’s church of the old covenant.
 - And it falls on the baptised who reject our Saviour.
2. It is a principle of scripture that God’s most severe judgement falls on those who have had the most light and have spurned it.
- Did Jesus not say that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the cities where He ministered that rejected Him and did not believe?
 - Indeed He did—to whom much is given, much shall be required.
 - Hebrews 10:26 warns those who are part of the New Testament church and reject Christ of the same thing.
 - **For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses.* ²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The LORD will judge His people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**
- B. There are two reasons God’s judgement is so severe to those within the church who reject Christ.
1. First, the judgment is severe because the sin is so severe.
 - What sin can compare with the sin of having a gracious Saviour come from heaven to die that we might freely come back to God...
 - And to reject Him! To despise Him! To spurn Him?
 - To have this salvation brought to you and offered to you—to be baptised and yet to refuse to have Him.
 2. Second, the judgment is severe for the glory of God.
 - We gloss over the glory of God displayed in His judgment.

- But nothing matters more than the glory of God.
- And His glory is seen in punishing sinners as they deserve and spurning Christ calls for the greatest judgment of all.
- If God did not punish this sin with great vengeance, it would bring great dishonour to Him... it would suggest that it is a small thing to reject His Son.
 - It would suggest that God is not very important—that it doesn't make much difference how we treat Him.
 - That's what people think and that must be corrected!
 - God will not allow His name and His person and His Son to be dishonoured.
 - That He is glorified is more important than anything else.
 - God knows that and we need to know that.
 - We sing the songs that God gave us in the Bible—the Psalms—
 - God gave them to us because He knows that we need to have our songs composed for us by Him.
 - These songs force us to sing and to praise God not only for His mercy and grace, but also for the glory of God's judgment.

TRANS> So you see that God's most severe judgment falls on His church.

- But Jesus makes it clear that it does not fall on us all—
- And that brings us to the third thing I want to show you today from this text.

III. Third, see here how God maintains a people in the church for Himself.

- Yes indeed. He always spares a remnant for Himself—what Paul calls a remnant according to election.
- A. Jesus shows how He works His judgement around them—so that they continue in the faith when others do not.
1. Jesus speaks of those He calls the elect—twice in our text and again in verse 27.
 - Consistently throughout the scriptures, the elect are the ones that He has chosen out from the rest for salvation—the ones that He preserves when they would have gone astray with all the rest.
 - None of us are any better.
 2. In verse 20, after speaking of the dreadful judgment coming upon His church, He says: **“And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.”**
 - His judgment of His church is softened from what it will be in the end—for the sake of His elect.
 - He works everything in such a way that they might be spared.
 3. In verse 22, He indicates that the elect are the ones that it is impossible to deceive.
 - He keeps them from being deceived.

- He causes the light of His glorious gospel to shine to them so that they cannot deny His truth—yes, they may stumble for a time, but they will not be able to continue in their error.
- B. See how He instructs them not to cling on to what He has abandoned—that church that has become apostate that He is rejecting.
1. This whole passage is a call for them to get away from the temple, to flee from Judea, to come out from among those who are being judged.
 - The New Testament epistles are full of warnings to believers not to follow those in the church who deny the truth or the way of Christ.
 - Jesus tells some of those in the seven churches that they are wrong to tolerate the Nicolaitans or those that follow Jezebel.
 - He tells them to come out from them—why cling to what He rejects and destroys?
 2. The same could be said on into church history—of the Arians who denied the deity of Christ—they were in the church, but the true believers had to reject them.
 - At the reformation, believers had to reject those who taught that salvation could be obtained by purchasing indulgences—or forgiveness found by praying to the saints—and that the scriptures must be kept from the people.
 - In our day, what tolerance does the Lord have for those many ministers who deny that Jesus is truly divine, that He rose from the dead, that He was born of a virgin, that His word is divine?
 - What judgment will fall on those who teach what is contrary to our Saviour’s word—who tolerate or even promote homosexuality, feminism, and the teaching that there is no hell?
 3. Jesus insists that His people must not tarry when they see those who have rejected His Son desecrating His church with their abominations.
 - You are to run for the hills without stopping to get your things.
 - Why would you cling to those that God is getting ready to judge?
 - How can you escape if you are clinging to them when God’s wrath falls?
 - We must bear the reproach of Christ outside the camp.
 - Today that is often outside the mainline churches that have departed from His gospel.
 - What is a church without the gospel? without Christ? without salvation?
 - It is a church with an abomination of desolation that God is going to reject.
 - Jesus tells us that here, and He tells us that in Revelation of the churches that are clinging to what He hates—He tells them that He will come and remove His lampstand.

Conclusion: See His gracious words of love in verse 23:

- **“But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.”**
 - How kind He is to warn us before His judgment comes so that we might flee from the wrath to come.

- Do not spurn His kindness—all He wants is for you to continue with Him—to continue in His grace and salvation that you might be saved.
 - That is why He speaks to us about these things—so that we can be with Him forever and not perish with the wicked.
 - Will you show yourself to be among His elect and take heed?