

“A CITY IN AGONY.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: Mark 13:14-23

Introduction.

If I said that in less than forty years the United States will cease to exist, our democracy will be destroyed, Washington DC will be razed to the ground, our military crushed and our way of life completely wiped out, would you find that hard to believe?

If I said a foreign nation would invade us and when they got done you wouldn't even recognize this as the United States, would that sound utterly impossible and crazy to you? Of course it would. No one could imagine such a scenario.

No one could imagine such a thing in Jesus' day either. The complete eradication of Jerusalem and the Jewish way of life was beyond belief. No one ever conceived of the possibility that God's covenant people and God's temple and God's prophets and priests and sacrifices would cease. No one ever dared to consider such a great divorce of God's people from God's land.

The Jews were constitutionally incapable of considering that God would allow their sacrificial system to end. They were firmly attached to their way of life, and were not able to hear all the prophecies about God's judgment. The disciples could scarcely take in the words of Jesus as He spoke of a great tribulation and a great deception.

Mark 13:14-20, The Great Tribulation.

Let's reset the stage for our text this morning. It's Wednesday of Holy Week, Jesus and His disciples have left the temple and are sitting up on the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple. The disciples asked Jesus to tell them when the temple would be destroyed and what the signs would be that it was about to be accomplished.

Jesus began by saying they would hear of wars and rumors of wars; there would be earthquakes and famines, but this would only be the beginning. In verse 14 He turns from generalities to specifics about the Jewish judgment.

Mark 13:14 “But when you see the *abomination of desolation* standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

“When you see” links back to the original when question the disciples asked Jesus, “When will these things happen?”

Abomination of desolation.

The abomination of desolation is a strange phrase to our ears. The Jews knew those words from Daniel's prophecy.

Daniel 9:26-27 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. *Desolations* are decreed. 27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of *abominations* shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the *desolator*." (See also Daniel 11:3; 12:11).

This was first fulfilled in 167BC when the Syrian general Antiochus IV placed a statue of Zeus on the altar of burnt offerings in the court of the temple and sacrificed a pig there. That desecration led to an uprising called the Maccabean Revolt.

Jesus used the term to foretell when the Roman Tenth Legion under the command of Titus would destroy the temple and set up altars in the temple area to offer sacrifices to pagan gods.

Jesus answered the disciples' first question. When you see the Romans coming run! Don't pass go, don't collect two hundred dollars, run. Don't look back, don't slow down to grab anything, just run for the hills. And hope you aren't a mother who is pregnant or nursing. And pray it doesn't happen in winter.

In 70AD the city of Jerusalem, the city of David, the holy city of God, was desolated by Gentiles. To the horror of the Jews their temple was profaned and burned. Their ancient system of worship ceased forever and God did nothing to stop it.

Those who fled survived. Those who stayed in Jerusalem found themselves surrounded and then starved to death by Titus' army. Desperate people resorted to cannibalism. Over a million people died in Jerusalem, so many that they couldn't be buried, and were just left in their homes and streets.

The great first century Jewish historian Josephus, wrote in his book *The Jewish War* just five years after the fall:

"No other city ever endured such miseries" (*Jewish War*, 5.422).

"Caesar ordered the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground ... All the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely leveled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited" (*Jewish War*, 7.3).

Why was this tribulation so great? Why did Jesus say there never was nor would there ever be a tribulation like this one? What was unique about this time?

Never before or since has there been such a willful, arrogant rejection of Christ. This was the most wicked sin of all time and the punishment would fit the crime. They were being rejected by their God. They had broken covenant, they had rejected their Messiah, and they were facing

imminent extinction. This judgment would be fatal. It would literally seem like the end of the world, like the end of life as they knew it.

There are not words to express the depth of their sinfulness in putting to death the Son of God. To the Jews Christ was an abomination and they rejected Him who would have been their salvation. So God sent upon them an abomination that became their desolation.

We should pay heed and take to heart how serious an offense it is against God to despise or ignore or reject His grace offered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

If the Lord had not cut short the days.

With God judgment and mercy always mingle together. We will see this in tonight's sermon on the justice and the mercy of God. If God had not cut the days short not a single Jew would have survived, the Jewish race would have ceased to exist. As it was, God spared a remnant, the elect.

God has an elect, His children, whom He has known from before the foundations of the earth. Note that God doesn't say His elect are saved *from* tribulation, but saved *in* tribulation.

Psalm 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

That God has chosen His elect doesn't destroy our responsibility to respond and act. Notice our text says God's elect are to flee from danger and save themselves. So also God's elect are to flee the danger of sin through repentance and faith and bear fruit in keeping with their repentance.

If you are talking to someone about your faith and challenging them to put their faith in Jesus, what would you say if they pushed back by saying: "I thought you had to be elect. What if I am not one of the elect?"

You can push that aside as a ruse, as a smokescreen. Simply speak to them the truth of Scripture.

All who believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved (Acts 16:31).

Whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37).

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Repent and believe (Acts 7:30; I John 3:23).

Believe in your heart and confess with your lips and you will be saved (Romans 10:9-11).

Mark 13:21-23, The Great Deception.

Once again Jesus warns there will be lots of false messiahs and false prophets predicting great things and doing miracles.

What irony! They rejected the true Messiah and then when their lives get turned upside down, they start believing every messiah that came along. Satan comes cleverly disguised to lead them

even further astray. All of this is part of God's judgment on ungrateful and wicked men who reject the truth.

Brothers and sisters, do you fear lies and deceits? Are you aware of the subtle lies in advertising and commercials? Are you praying for discernment and wisdom? Are you testing the spirits and examining what you hear by Scripture? Are you aware that there are false prophets and false teachers all around us? Are you aware there are a lot of people out there trying to deceive you? Don't believe everyone who says they are a Christian.

Are you aware that many of the Christian books in the Christian book store have theological error in them?

Just this week I became aware of some potential errors in a very popular bestselling book, errors Phama and I missed. The book is Sarah Young's *Jesus Calling*. I know many of you have it; we have given it as gifts and believe me I know how sensitive this is. Let me point out three dangers and let you go back and see if you see them in her book.

First, Sarah Young says that after many years of writing her own words she decided to listen and write Jesus' words, 365 devotionals that are messages from Jesus. She says the Bible is the only inerrant Word of God, but it's open to confusion that what she hears are direct quotes from Jesus, which means they are **authoritative** and inerrant. It would have been better if she had written them in the third person as her own words and reflections.

Second, in her introduction she writes that while she had her Bible she desired something more, a more direct and more personal voice from God. The unintended danger here is she is undermining the perfect **sufficiency** of God's Word. The implication is the Bible wasn't enough, she wanted other words from God. If we want to be closer to Jesus and to experience Jesus in a more personal and intimate way, He cannot be closer to us than He is in His Word and by His Spirit speaking to us through His Word.

Third, what she writes claiming to be directly from Jesus **doesn't sound like Jesus** in the Bible. Her words are full of sweet, tender, feelings and emotions. Many of the devotions are about quiet rest, peace and comfort. Those are good things but what's missing is Jesus' commands, His call to repentance and holiness. The first mention of Jesus dying for our sins is February 28 and the next one is August 9. It's unbalanced and as a result presents a skewed perspective of Jesus and Scripture.

Go back and carefully read the introduction and then pray for discernment to test what it contains. We should always be a little skeptical and very discerning about any book that becomes very popular.

I have told you all things beforehand.

Jesus loves us and cares for us by telling us the truth. He tells us all things that we need to know.

Jesus says "Watch! Be on your guard. Live ready and prepared." The mark of faithfulness is watchfulness and obedience.

We are secure but our security must not lead to apathy. His warnings are for a reason.

Application and Conclusion.

People are always very interested in prophetic things in the Bible. There's a huge fascination with the end times and when and what's going to happen. People are more interested in signs than they are in Jesus; more interested in signs than in changing our hearts and lives in response to what Jesus says about the end.

When the Holy Spirit inspired these words to be included in Scripture it wasn't to tickle our curiosity, but to stimulate our holiness.

And in this broken and dying world where things aren't getting better and better He calls us to be light in a dark world and salt in a decaying world.

We would be wise and do well to consider how fleeting and fragile this life is, the span of our days is but a wisp of smoke. The end of time may be a long ways away but each of our end is coming very quickly. It's folly to spend all our days acquiring things and accumulating stuff, earthly treasures and pleasures.

It's all kindling for a very great fire. What are we living and working for? What are we grasping and clutching onto so tightly? Are our treasures on earth or in heaven? Are we investing for life here or for life to come?

Are we being shortsighted and apathetic when Jesus has warned us and urged us to watch and be prepared?

As God judged His people Israel, so He will judge His church.

I Peter 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

And as He judges His church, so He judges and disciplines us. God disciplines those He loves.

The abomination of desolation was when the pagan armies of Rome enter the holy city and the holy temple. When that which is unholy enters what is holy it's an offense to our holy God.

It happens to us when we sin against God, when we profane the temple of the Holy Spirit with our lusts and greed, our pride and selfishness, our bitterness and gossip. Jesus is calling us to repentance and righteousness, to holiness and watchfulness, to look to Him and to be conformed to His image and likeness. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Mark 13:13 the one who endures to the end will be saved.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.