

Announcements:

- 1). Picnic and Waterslide after church
- 2). Church Campout, Sept 10-12
- 3) Club 215, Sept 16
 - 1) prayer warriors
 - 2) If anyone is interested in helping, let us know
 - a) help in classes
 - b) help with food (donate food, donate money for food, prepare food)
- 4) Ian Founds engaged, wedding is Nov 19
- 5) Prayer for schooling at GBC

Stay Alert: Hated for the Gospel's Sake **Mark 13**

As followers of Christ, we have been encouraged to Stay Alert, to keep our eyes open and be ready. The disciples had asked Jesus a couple questions after remarking about the magnificence of the temple and the stones and Jesus replied as we see in verse 2 of Mark 13 that they will be completely destroyed, not one stone will be left on top of another.

The temple was magnificent. This was the second temple. The first temple was Solomon's temple, the one that King David asked God if he could build and God told him, no. He could get the supplies ready, but his son would build the temple. That first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC. In roughly 538BC, Zerubbabel came along and began to rebuild the temple, which is known as the second temple. It was not as large and as magnificent as the first, but it served the Jewish people for a place of worship. It was finished in 516BC. But, over the next 400 years it would be taken over and built up and defiled by Gentile rulers. They would sacrifice that which was unholy on the altar.

In about 39BC, so some 30 years before Jesus, King Herod would conquer the land and take control of the temple. King Herod was an arab, but a practicing jew...to some degree. This is the same Herod that heard of a King being born and had the baby boys under 2 years of age killed hoping to get rid of this baby, which we know is Jesus. King Herod decided to renovate and make magnificent the temple for the Jews to worship. King Herod was known for large, grandiose building projects that

were quite advanced for the day. So, somewhere about 18BC he finished the temple in one and a half years and the courtyard in 8 years, and then from then until 63AD there were more improvements made. The temple grounds were huge.

The stones that were used were absolutely huge. They were an architectural feat of the day for something of that size and weight to be moved let alone set on top of another stone to make a building. And the precision cuts for the stones were precise. Herod, as I said did everything grandiose.

But, in AD70 when a revolt happened between Jewish zealots and Roman authorities, many Jews went to the temple for safety and Titus, in need to conquer, came in and burned it down. It was so hot it burnt the gold and silver to the point it melted into the cracks and many Jews, men, woman, and children died. How did the stones get torn down so that not one was left upon another, because a fire wouldn't necessarily do that? The Roman soldiers, as well as others maybe, took the temple apart, stone by stone to get to the gold and silver so much so that not one stone was left upon another. The attack upon Jews felt so intense that they ran away to far away areas, many to never come back until after World War II when they were given their land back.

Jesus warned them of this when the disciples were marveling at the temple and its magnificence. The disciples asked a couple questions. They said, "Tell us, when will all this happen?" and "What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?" Matthew 23 gives us more specifics of the second question which is, "What will signal your return and the end of the world?" The disciples were still looking for the conquering King to come and overthrow Rome and make Israel great again. We have to be careful that our zeal is not looking for someone to make America great again and miss the opportunities to reveal Christ to a chaotic, confused, hopeless, fear-filled, looking-for-a-savior-to-save-them-from-a-disease culture.

As we learned two weeks ago, Mark 13 is less of a prescription for an end times timetable, but really more of an encouragement and exhortation of what to do in the meantime for the disciples and for you and me. We are told to 'Stay Alert'.

The idea of staying alert is to be prepared. We are to be ready. We are to have made our preparations for the coming King...preparations that are prescribed by the King. What are those preparations? To be about the gospel of Jesus, to expand His kingdom by sharing that gospel message. As 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us." You and I are how the gospel message gets out to a world dying from the disease of sin. God is making His appeal to the world through us. You and I are the conduit God chose to use. As imperfect, frail, unable to be perfectly faithful, giving-in-to-selfishness-people, God still uses us to get His message out. Why? Because that is what He chose. Why? So that you and I can be experience the blessing of seeing others come to Christ, have changed lives that are filled with joy and hope. What speaks to others? Seeing the change in your life. Seeing the hope in your life. Seeing that the stuff of this world is only temporary and you have something greater you are looking to.

I was reading on facebook recently of someone who did CPR on a person who was in an accident and the person survived. That is exciting! Imagine what that person felt. You feel good about being able to save someone's life. You feel good to know you kept someone from death. How much greater is it when you do spiritual CPR and keep someone from spiritual death? Let's pray for hearts that are broken for those spiritually dead. Let's be people not ashamed to share the gospel.

You and I must be prepared. We are told by Jesus to be prepared. Jesus helped His disciples and us be prepared by telling us what we can expect. Jesus told His disciples in John 16:1, "I have told you these things so that you won't abandon your faith." We can expect to be hated by the world for the sake of the gospel. We can expect to be mistreated, made fun of, and shunned by the world. Actually, scripture tells us in the New Testament that as time goes and we get closer to Jesus coming back, this world is going to become more and more hostile towards Christians.

Jesus had warned the disciples of what they would face. He told them they would be persecuted, but He told them He would be with them giving them words to say when the time came. Jesus said in Mark 13:9, "When these things begin to happen, watch out! Actually, let's stop there and let's get an understanding of this word Jesus uses, "watch out". It means to see, be observant. Okay, makes sense. Kind of a big duh statement.

But, it isn't talking about being observant necessarily of just the physical. It suggests being observant of the physical, but looking for spiritual results. In other words, Jesus is saying, "When these things begin to happen, be looking beyond the physical things going on and look for spiritual applications, spiritual opportunities, spiritual results."

Let's read all of Mark 13:9, "When these things begin to happen, watch out! You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me."

I don't know about you, but if I have not prepared and been prepared beforehand, my response when people start to persecute me for my faith is not sharing the gospel. It isn't to love them and find forgiveness in my heart for them. You and I must be prepared. Jesus told us that we will be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

What do we do to be prepared?

As you know, our daughter went to Navy bootcamp a little over a month ago now. To hear the transformation in her voice from the first phone call to this last call was good to hear. Bootcamp is hard. Bootcamp, as I understand is strenuous, physically, but very much mentally. But going to war is exponentially more strenuous physically and mentally. In bootcamp the goal is to make you physically and mentally tough so you can survive. You have someone helping you to shed your old thinking and helping you with a new way of thinking. They want you to move from thinking like a civilian to thinking like a soldier. You are given skills that can help you through those times that are life and death. You are given skills to learn how to work together for success and skills that prepare you for times that can't/won't be prepared for. This last week she had the opportunity to go into the chamber...to be gassed. They do that so you know what it is like and so you aren't taken off guard if it happens to you in battle. There are some specialized groups in some branches that when they are in training they do more than just gas them, there is physical beating and mental games played to train them to stand up under the pressure of being caught by the enemy.

You and I are in a fight against the enemy. We have an enemy who wants to thwart God's plan. That enemy does not want to see God's plan unfold and for people to be saved. He knows his days are numbered. He knows

that Jesus died on the cross. He knows that Jesus rose from the grave. He heard the prophecies of the Old Testament period that pointed to a Messiah. He knows that Jesus has great power. He knows that people who are saved are dangerous to His plan. So, that enemy of God must attack God's people. He must do all he can to create fear and doubt. He knows humanity and its history. He knows the systems of this world. He uses humanity and its fear and the systems of this world to shame and squash the freedom that Christ brings. So, he persecutes any and everything that resembles God. His absolute hatred for the things of God is leashed upon the world and he will use whatever he can to begin to tear away at God. The fight of good verses evil is more than a Harry Potter story. It's real. It's actual good verses evil. It's found in the physical realm, empowered by the spiritual realm. You and I must be ready. We must know we will be hated for the gospel's sake. We will be hated because of the name of Jesus. We will be hated because they hate Jesus.

This is sounding pretty dark right now, but I don't want to sugarcoat this. I also don't want to create fear for fear's sake. I just want us to speak to the reality of the spiritual battle that is raging. It's important for us to remember what Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."

We must remember that the enemy we war against is in the evil realm and he does use people that are given to their sin nature, held captive by that evil realm. Because of that, they are power hungry. They are given to a lie of false dreams. They are fearful so they look to conquer.

We have a hope of something greater. We have a hope of what Jesus promised in eternity. We have a God who has already overcome. John 16:33 says, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

This word overcome is a word speaking of victory, of a battle that has already been won, but skirmishes still happen.

When Jesus said, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me", He was saying, "I have given you what you need and because of that

you can have peace.” What has He giving according to this conversation with the disciples in John 16? His Holy Spirit to be an advocate for us. The Holy Spirit is the third member of the triune God. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. All God, unified together. All with the power of God. Each with a role. The Spirit of God is the sustaining power of God in us that points us to the truth and convicts the world of its sin. God’s Spirit is who gives us strength in those times of peril, those times that we just can’t make it on our own. God’s Spirit works in us and testifies to God’s presence with us. Our role is to rely upon Him. Our role is to trust that He will lead us. Our role is to trust that as we are put in situations, God’s Spirit will work through us in action and in word.

By the way, the peace that Jesus brings into the world is not peace for the world, it’s peace for the believer. The peace He brings to the world will be after He returns. The peace He speaks of in John 16 is speaking of inner peace that you and I can have within our hearts and minds that in the end, it all works out. No matter what happens, Christ will not leave us nor forsake us. In the end, we will be with Christ in heaven, forgiven, made righteous, in the very presence of God, basking in His glory as He pours out His glory on us.

We must prepare. We must be observant. We must look for opportunities and be ready when they come.

How do we prepare and live under being hated?

Knowledge is one of the greatest preparations. That is why Jesus is sharing with His disciples that there is persecution coming. But, He also shares with them things that bring assurance. God’s Word is where we gain knowledge of the story and how we are to live within that story and what to look for and be prepared for.

Choose to live for Christ. We must make a choice to live for Christ or not. To be a fan of Jesus is not enough. Paul made this choice. Paul was persecuted and he saw it as a blessing and reaped the reward. In Philippians 1:21 he said, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Paul wrote Philippians while under house arrest, awaiting the decision of Rome to behead him because of his faith in Christ. This was after being shipwrecked, imprisoned multiple times, put on trial, whipped multiple times, and beaten. Listen to some of what he said.

Philippians 1:12-14 “And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear.”

Philippians 1:27-30 “Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Don’t be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.”

Galatians 2:20 says, “My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Paul chose to live for Christ. Paul chose to trust Christ. Paul chose that the gospel message was more important than any other agenda he had. Paul chose to make sure others knew the gospel message, even those who were imprisoning him. Paul led many to Christ. Are we intensely and intentionally doing that in the midst of what we are going through today?

Trust God’s Spirit. God’s Spirit, as you place yourself in obedience to God, will work through you. His Spirit will strengthen you. He will speak through you. As you gain knowledge of God’s Word and as you choose to trust Him, you open the door for God’s Spirit to work through you and speak for you in those times

Jesus told the disciples when that day comes and you have to have a response, it won’t be you speaking, it will be the Holy Spirit.

Now, this doesn’t mean we are unprepared. It means, when we don’t have an opportunity to be prepared, God intervenes in that moment giving us the things to say. Just as Jesus told the disciples before they went to the garden of Gethsemane, the Spirit of God will bring back to memory the things you have been taught, you have learned.

Choose love for your enemy. If you are like me, this will take an act of God...and that is why we must put ourself into a stance of trusting Christ, His Word, and God's Spirit. It's hard to forgive. It's hard to love someone who is destroying your hopes and dreams, your liberties, and taking away from you the most precious things. Pray for your enemy. Choose to do good to your enemy. Choose to love them as Christ chose to love his enemy...you and me, who also put Him on the cross.

Cory Ten Boom is a good example of this. The soldier who was abusing her, persecuting her, torturing her deserved her anger and hatred...and she struggled with it. She began to pray asking for God to help her love him as He loved her. Her heart began to break for the men who would do heinous acts to her. Many years later, after she was let out of prison, she was speaking at a conference about her ordeal and God's working in the ordeal. Afterwards, a man walked up to her and thanked her. He thanked her for listening to Christ and choosing to love him as Christ loved her. He was one of the soldiers that tortured her. It was a hard moment for her, and she had to choose Christ and His forgiveness again. But, because she had already practiced trusting Christ, being led by God's Spirit and practicing it many times over, she was able to do it. She shook his hand.

I remember hearing a trial of a young man who was murdered. The judge gave the parents an opportunity to speak to the young man. They spoke of their heartache. They shared some memories. But, what they shared most was of their love of Christ and their love and forgiveness for this man that murdered their son. They were set free. The man was given a chance to be set free. God was now given room to do what only God can do... save a lost man, take a bad situation and bring good out of it.

Look to the reward. The reward is eternity with Christ. The reward is a family of believers. The reward is Christ with us. The reward is He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Listen to Mark 10:28-29, "Then Peter began to speak up. "We've given up everything to follow you," he said. "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life."

The reward is going to a place of no more suffering, shame, sorrow. Revelation 21:3-4 says, "I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

Persecution is all throughout our world. We are hearing and seeing it aggressively happen now in Afghanistan. It is happening all over the world. North Korea Christians are put in prison and many killed. China has ramped up its surveillance upon Christians and they are imprisoning them and killing them. Parts of South Africa are being hit hard by persecution. In middle eastern countries, if you are found to follow Christ, you can't work, your family is to either to treat you as dead or kill you to make right your 'wrong', you lose your marriage inheritance, you get turned into authorities to which you may be raped, beaten, or killed. In the Western world, we don't see as much aggressive persecution, but it is here.

We shouldn't be surprised by this. We should be saddened, but not surprised. Jesus said we will be persecuted. Paul even found it as a blessing to be called worthy to suffer for Christ. Peter found it as a blessing to be called worthy to suffer for Christ. We can too.

1 Peter 2