

“How Not to Worry”

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“Let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things.” (C. S. Lewis)

Mark 13:1-13

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(Corinth sermons are available in audio and print forms at corinthtoday.org/sermons.)

The Temple and the Mount (1-4) – Pastor Bob

There are at least three primary ways to understand this passage, and Christians disagree.

1. This is one of many apocalyptic passages that describe the perpetual struggle between good and evil.
2. This is about the end times – specifically the Great Tribulation.
3. This is about the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

While we honor those who differ, we are going with Option 3. That’s not necessarily true of the whole chapter, but of verses 1-13 specifically.

Jesus has left the temple, and in verse 1 one of the disciples says “Look, Teacher! What massive stones!” The Jewish temple had been rebuilt by Herod the Great, and it was a massive structure. One of the stones has been estimated to weigh 570 tons. It’s 45 feet long and one of the heaviest objects ever lifted by humanity before the modern age. The entire structure caused these “Galilee country boys” to gape in awe.

Jesus responds to this exclamation by saying every stone will be thrown down (2). Picture any iconic, magnificent structure – the White House, the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal. The disciples cannot understand how nothing could be left of this building, especially with its importance to the Jewish faith.

Jesus and the disciples then moved to the Mount of Olives (3), and four of the disciples asked Jesus privately to tell them when *these things* will happen and what the sign will be when *these things* are about to be fulfilled (4). What things? What Jesus just said—that the Temple will be destroyed. That’s why we take these next verses to describe what happened in AD 70.

What Jesus Said (5-13) – Pastor Paul

When someone says don’t panic, it raises three questions.

1. How grave is the situation?
2. What inside knowledge does the person have of the situation?
3. What kind of control does the person have over of the situation?

When Jesus says “Don’t panic,” what he is talking about is huge. When we look at the other two questions, we see that Jesus does have commanding knowledge and commanding power over the situation.

In times of crisis, people are looking for hope. You will not find a shortage of people who will raise their hands and tell you to put your hope in them. Jesus says to hold on to the truth. Others claim, “I am he,” but Jesus is the only Messiah (5-6).

In some ways, verses 7 & 8 describe what’s happened from Jesus’ time until now. When in history have there not been wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famine, plagues, etc.? When we look at coronavirus, we realize “these things” have now come into our corner of the world. We are not unique or privileged. We respond in fear: buying guns and hoarding food.

Jesus then tells the disciples that they will be taken into the synagogues and beaten (9). The synagogue was their safety and their shelter. Jesus tells them, “Not anymore.” The things in which they found safety and hope would be removed.

Jesus also says the gospel is going out and is unstoppable (10-13). It’s going to be received but it’s not going to be celebrated by everyone. It will be met with resistance. Don’t be surprised by that.

Verse 10 seems at first like a challenge to our view that vv. 1-13 are only about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. But when Jesus says, “The gospel must be preached to all nations,” he simply means that before the end of the temple (the end of Judaism as they knew it), the gospel needed to become an “all-nations gospel.” That’s what happens in the book of Acts.

This sermon is titled, “How Not to Worry.” When you first read this text, you don’t see any reasons not to worry. There’s a lot of bad news – from total destruction of a structural icon to wars and famines, to trial and beatings, to family rivalry. Where’s the hope? In the text itself we find five ways not to worry.

How Not to Worry (Pastors Paul and Bob)

(1) Seek and claim the truth: *Watch out that no one deceives you* (5).

The opposite of being misled and looking around would be to actively seek the truth. Hebrews 12: 26-27 says Jesus will shake all things until only the eternal remains. We have put our hope in so many things but the truth of the gospel is the only thing that will give us hope. The other things can be shaken. They are not eternal. The truth of the gospel will remain. Life and light will come from Jesus when we seek the truth and have our hope grounded in Jesus Christ. We want to be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have because it's found in the gospel. The truth of the gospel is what gives us hope when people are not always telling us the truth.

(2) Remember that pain births new life: *These are the beginnings of birth pains* (8).

Don't focus on the pain. Jesus is talking about the kind of pain that brings life. Mothers are certainly aware of the pain of childbirth, but the reason they face it willingly is because they know on the other side of the pain is a new life.

Our situation is not unprecedented. In 1948 C. S. Lewis noted that the fears concerning an atomic bomb were simply the contemporary equivalent of the medieval plague or Viking raids or syphilis or war raids or traffic accidents. He added,

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation.... It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty....

The first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

So what should dominate our minds? That this is not the end of civilization, nor of our story. Whether in heaven or on earth, God will bring life on the other side.

(3) Seize the moment for spreading the gospel. *You will stand as witnesses* (9).
The gospel must first be preached to all nations (10)

The synagogue was never holy because it was a holy place. It was holy because Jesus was there. Jesus' presence will now be in you. They think, "The building made me holy." Jesus says, "No, what I am going to do for you on the cross and through the resurrection will make you holy." In our generation, this pandemic will be the moment we are showing the world the hope and the truth of the gospel.

(4) Trust the Holy Spirit for words. *It is not you speaking but the Holy Spirit* (11).

We will have new opportunities for spiritual conversation, to help ourselves and others not worry. How do we do that when we don't have the answers? We don't need to figure out all of the answers. If we wait until we think we have all of the answers to the questions that somebody might ask, we will never initiate a spiritual conversation. We don't prepare for spiritual conversations by cramming but by trusting. When we display a spiritual confidence the world can't understand, we open doors for more words.

The Apostle Paul reminds in Romans 8 that each member of the Trinity participates in our hope. When we don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us (26). If Jesus died for us, then God is for us. And if God is for us, who can be against us (31-32)? Nothing will separate us from the love of God (38-39). People don't need the answers. They need to know that you have a hope that is secure and strong in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will give you that in any spiritual conversation you might have.

(5) Claim the hope of salvation. *The one who stands firm to the end will be saved* (13).

What does it mean to truly be a disciple of Christ not just a fan of who he is? The Sunday after September 11th we had a huge crowd at church but a month after September 11th, our attendance was back to normal.

If you were one of those people reaching out, what were you reaching out for? Were you reaching out for the institution, the building, or other people of faith? Now the institution has been taken away from you. Being with other people of faith has been taken away from you. In this place where we are, who and what are you reaching out to? Where is the hope for your salvation?

No more can we just come to the church for our holy fix. Until the government tells us otherwise, we can't do that. No more can we lean on other people and vicariously live off the faith, hope, and joy of others. Now it comes down to where is your personal hope, faith, trust, and assurance? It's only if you are saved that good things come to those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). If you don't know that, where's the good in this? It is in the author and perfecter of hope, faith, and truth.

In him alone we find our hope. He is the reason we don't worry. Amen.