

Mark 13

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of watching and praying for the Lord's coming, as the end times are near and the great tribulation will soon begin.

Scripture: Mark 13:1

Topics: "End Times", "Vigilance in Faith"

Description

John Nelson Darby discusses the prophetic warnings given by Jesus regarding the judgment of Jerusalem and the trials that His disciples would face in the absence of His physical presence. He emphasizes the importance of being vigilant and prepared for the coming tribulations, including the rise of false prophets and the persecution of believers. Darby highlights the eventual restoration of Israel and the ultimate return of Christ, encouraging the disciples to remain steadfast in their faith despite the challenges ahead. The sermon serves as a reminder of God's sovereignty and the necessity of watching and praying as they await the Lord's return.

Transcript

We have seen the people judged, each class brought by God's hand into the Lord's presence to receive their judgment; we have seen them morally condemned by the word of God and by the blessed Lord's wisdom. But the iniquity which drew forth the execution itself must cause many difficulties to the disciples. They would have to walk in a way full of dangers, and they are warned themselves here how they may escape the judgment which was about to fall upon the beloved people for their sins. The Lord would no longer be present to guide them; but His heart could not leave them in ignorance either as to the path or as to the difficulties they would have to encounter. And the testimony which Jesus gave of it would make the difficulties and dangers a proof of the truth of His words, and an encouragement for their hearts when they should find themselves in the trouble.

But the Lord does not stop at the fulfilment of the judgment soon to be realised, but opens up the ways of God up to His coming, when Israel shall be blessed again after having passed through such a judgment that a little remnant only of the people will be left; and the power of the beasts (that is, of the Gentile empires) will be destroyed, Satan bound, and the world will rest in peace. Nevertheless it is more as a warning to His disciples that the Lord speaks here than as an announcement of the peace and rest of the world after the execution of judgment.

The disciples, accustomed to see in the temple the house of God and the glorious centre of their religion, full of wonder, point out to the Lord the beauty of the buildings and the size of the stones, and, as often happened, they give to the Lord the opportunity to communicate God's thoughts to them about the times and the state of the guilty nation. He announces to them clearly the destruction of the temple as a certain fact; but when the disciples asked when that should happen, He speaks of the people's state up to His coming, as far as this history has to do with the service of His disciples. In general that which is said is similar to that contained in Matthew's Gospel; but the Holy Spirit here presents the Lord to us as being more occupied with teaching His disciples.

309 As in Matthew we have general teaching here, which goes on to the end of the period of the proclamation of grace; then the especial sign of the final ruin of Jerusalem, which immediately precedes the Lord's coming in glory. This interest in the disciples as to their testimony and service answers to the character of this Gospel, which gives us a history of the service of the Lord Himself. The Lord does not immediately answer the disciples' question, but warns them of the dangers they would encounter in their service, after His departure. Satan would raise up false Christs to deceive the Jews, and many should be deceived. They would have to be on their guard. Wars and rumours of wars would take place, but they were not to be troubled about this; these things must happen, but the end should not be yet. These were the beginning of sorrows, but not the end.

He does not speak of the mission of the apostle Paul, but of that of the twelve in the midst of the Jews; only the gospel must be preached to all the nations before the end. The fact is asserted, without its being said how it ought to be fulfilled. We know that it will be the gospel of the kingdom, as it might have been preached during the Lord's lifetime. Here is the simple announcement of a testimony of the gospel sent to the nation before the end should come. But the consequence of this testimony, as far as the disciples were concerned, would be persecution; they would be beaten in the synagogues and accused before kings and governors for a testimony to them. This is the means which the Lord uses to carry the gospel to kings and to the great of the earth. The preachers are not the great of the earth, and His disciples would have always to preserve their true character; in this they would appear before kings and rulers as prisoners to give an account of their faith.

Thus the apostle Paul appeared before the Jewish council, before Festus, Agrippa, and finally before Caesar. But the possible result of the preaching of the gospel was not all. The revelation of God in the person of Christ, or in the preached word, awakens the enmity of the human heart. So long as God is not revealed, everything is tolerated; but when He is revealed, man's will rises up against His authority, and against the pressure which this revelation exerts upon a conscience not at rest; and the closer the relations are, the greater is the hatred. This hatred breaks all the ties of nature: brother would give up brother to death, and the father his son; the children would rise up against their parents and would put them to death; and the disciples would be hated of all men for the Saviour's name.

310 What a testimony to the state of man's heart! If one speaks of the name of Jesus and of His love, of the love of Him who came to save us, the hatred of man's heart breaks all barriers; it refuses to recognise and tramples down all natural affections. But the time of deliverance will come, and here it is an earthly deliverance that is in question. It is still better for us; if we are killed, we go to be with the Lord; if He comes, we shall be glorified with Him. But here the Lord speaks of the testimony and service of the apostles in the midst of the Jews. In whatever way we look at it, there remaineth a rest for the people of God. But there is more; God would be with them in the way. When the disciples should be in the presence of the magistrates, they were not to meditate upon that which they ought to say; it would not be necessary

to prepare discourses; the Holy Spirit would be with them; and it should be given them what to say at that very moment.

Here is the picture that the Lord draws of the service of His people in the midst of the Jews up to the end; He adds that the gospel shall be preached to the ends of the earth. But now in verse 14 He comes to a more precise and definite notice of the events which should happen in Jerusalem at the end. "When," He says, "ye shall see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not (let him that readeth understand), then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains." Here we must look at Daniel's prophecy which speaks of this abomination: we find it in chapter 12. The word "abomination" simply means idol; and it is called abomination of desolation because it is the cause of the desolation of Jerusalem and of the Jewish people.

The Jews will receive the Antichrist. The Lord said, "I have come in my Father's name, and ye have not received me; if another come in his own name, him will ye receive." Then under the influence of Antichrist they will turn to idolatry again. The unclean spirit which came out of them after the Babylonish captivity will enter into them again with seven spirits worse than itself, and the last state will be worse than the first; Matt. 12:43-45. They will then set up an idol in the most holy place, where it ought not to be placed, and God's judgment will fall upon the people and city. The desolation will be complete: "There shall be trouble such as never was." And Daniel says, "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people, and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was . . ." This trouble must last for a time, times and a half, that is, three and a half Jewish years, or 1,260 days, or 42 months. Then those who are written in God's book shall be saved - those who shall have endured to the end in spite of the difficulties, sufferings, and the oppression of the Antichrist and Gentiles as the Lord had foretold.

311 In the meantime, during the time of their general service, the Holy Ghost would give them all wisdom, and even the very words they would need. The Lord's goodness here is very remarkable; we find the Lord thinking even of the weather in the midst of this terrible judgment, so terrible indeed that nothing like it has been known in the world's history. He tells them to pray that their flight be not in the winter. He does not speak here as in Matthew of the sabbath, because Jewish things are not so much in view here as in that Gospel. He thinks of those who are with child and of those who give suck in those days. Ah! how great is the Saviour's compassion; nothing escapes His gracious memory. Whilst warning His disciples of the most terrible judgment, He thinks of all the difficulties they would meet upon the road He teaches them to take.

But the Lord has shortened these days, or no flesh could be saved; but He has shortened them for His own elect's sake. Then to give a hope of deliverance and of escape from sufferings, false Christs and false prophets would arise and would perform miracles and signs (so great is Satan's power when God permits) to seduce if possible the very elect. But they had been warned; and now after this unparalleled tribulation which should come upon Jerusalem, the end of the dispensation would come; all established authority should be overturned by God's judgment. The order which He had established for the government of the earth shall be thrown into confusion. The signs of His judgment appear.

Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. The Lord appears to take possession of the earth, which He not only has created, but which He has acquired as His own as Son of man by His death. But that which is specially announced here is that He will send His angels to gather together His elect from all parts of the world. It is always a question here of the land and of Israel: the blessing of the Gentiles and of the whole world will take place, but it is not the question here. Our place

is a far higher one: when Christ shall appear, we shall appear with Him; Col. 3:4. The Lord will have already gathered us to Himself in the air, He will have glorified us already and made us like Himself, according to His boundless grace which has acquired this glory for us according to the eternal counsels of a just God; we shall be like His Son and with Him for ever, the firstborn among many brethren; but here He speaks of the elect in the midst of Israel, dispersed amongst the Gentiles.

312 All here has to do with the earthly people. "This generation," of which verse 31 speaks, is the perverse and unbelieving generation of the Jews, which indeed remains even to our day a race separated from all the others. They dwell amongst the nations, but they remain ever a separate people, kept for the fulfilment of the counsels of God. We find this fact and the force of the word "generation" in Deuteronomy 32:5-20: "It is a perverse and crooked generation." And as regards the judgment under which the nation lies, after that the Lord has pronounced these words, it is said in verse 20, "I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom there is no faith."

The three times and a half make up the time which the goodness and mercy of God have shortened, the last half-week of Daniel which remains still unfulfilled. After that the abomination shall have been set up in the most holy place, where it ought not to be, there shall be three years and a half; and after that, some days to purify the temple. Thus the remnant of the Jews will have the consolation of knowing in the midst of the great tribulation that it will only be for a short time. But we are quite ignorant as to when this solemn moment will come; it is not revealed; God alone knows when it will be. The Lord sends out the disciples in connection with the Jews; and when they should see that these events were beginning to be fulfilled, then should they know that the time was drawing near.

313 "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away." The destruction of Jerusalem under Titus the Roman emperor was something like this, but the Lord's prophecy was in no wise accomplished. First of all, the Lord did not come after this event; then also that about which Daniel had spoken had not come to pass. Whether we count 1,260 days or 1,260 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, nothing happened at that time; and then there cannot be two tribulations "such as never were." In Luke's Gospel we find first of all the destruction of Jerusalem and the present state of the Jews; nevertheless he does not speak of the abomination of desolation; but he distinguishes very clearly the siege under Titus from the coming of the Lord much later on. Mark's Gospel speaks first of all the disciples' service up to the end, and then of the final tribulation, beginning with the fact of the setting up of the abomination of the desolation where it ought not to be; this begins at verse 14.

We find this time of tribulation in Jeremiah 30:7; but in the trouble which came upon the nation at the destruction under Titus the Jews were not saved. In Daniel 12 we find again deliverance and the intervention of God by means of Michael; and this will happen at Christ's second coming. The only passages which speak of the great tribulation such as never was are Jeremiah 30:7, Daniel 12:1, Matthew 24, and Mark 13; all these refer to the last days terminated by the manifestation of Christ.

Lastly the Lord exhorts them to watch and pray, for they know not the hour when this time should come. He was like unto a man going upon a journey, who left His house (we see that the earth and Jerusalem are in question), and who gave authority to His servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. This is a picture of the manner in which the Lord has left His disciples in the midst of the Jews. But that which He said unto them He says unto all, Watch. This is the exhortation for us; we are called to wait for the Lord, not knowing when He will come back, lest He find us sleeping. May grace work in our hearts, so that we may be expecting His coming with real desire to see Him; may we walk in such a

manner as to be able to rejoice always at the thought of His coming! May it never be too soon for us!

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