The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times

13 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

2 “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

5 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

9 “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

ILL: Twin Towers: Never visited NYC until last summer. Of course visiting 9/11 memorial was a key item on our agenda. I can’t imagine working downtown Manhattan every day and then experiencing the tragedy of that day – and then even now going to work with the gaping hole in the cityscape where the towers once stood.

Now back up to First Century Jerusalem. The temple was every bit as prominent to the city as the Twin Towers – arguably much more. It was an architectural masterpiece. King Herod invested heavily in rebuilding the temple and making it a marvel to the world – his motives were anything but pure but the Jews benefited by having the temple once again a prominent place.

If you stood on the Mount of Olives and looked at the city, the Temple would stand directly across the Kidron Valley. The gold would glisten in the sun. The size of the stones would make the mind marvel even today, one of the largest measures nearly 40 feet by 8 feet by 43” high and weighs approximately 80 tons.

The temple is the center of worship for the Jews. It is a source of pride during a time of oppression.
And thus comes the statement from One of Jesus’ disciples.

“Teacher, behold what wonderful stones, what wonderful buildings!”

I admit that I’m the type who doesn’t handle silence well. I feel the need to fill the vacuum with words though I’ve gotten better at mastering that urge as I’ve grown older.

John chose not to tell who made the statement.
I see this comment from such a person, perhaps Peter who seemed to have the same problem as me.

But whoever made the statement, I can say with confidence, he and his fellow disciples were **struck by Jesus’ reply**.

**“Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another. Every one will be thrown down.”**

That’s a statement that changes the mood of a conversation!

Surely murmuring commenced and heads spun at these words.

We don’t know the entire audience of Jesus’ statement but verse 3 picks up, that as they sat on the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John, and Andrew questioned him privately.

Remember that as they sat on the Mount of Olives they would be nearly eye level to the temple looking across the Kidron Valley. Their heads would still be spinning.

Their questions went like this.

Jesus: **WHEN** will these things be?

**WHAT** will be the signs?

If I were sitting there, I would have asked the same questions. Jesus had just given this **stunning prophecy**. They are **natural questions**.

Jesus often answered a question with a question. This time, he answers with a warning.
The Disciples ask
   When will this happen?
   What will be the signs?

Jesus, “WATCH! Lest you be deceived!”

**Necessary to be clear** – Jesus did **not** say watch for **signs** of my coming. He said **watch** lest you be **deceived**.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this conversation and Jesus taught in parables about his second coming as well. We will explore some of those passages as we enter the season of advent. The warning is always Be Alert – never when you see X, look to the sky for Jesus is coming today.

Why would Jesus worry about disciples being deceived?

First, they are still wrestling with the understanding what it means for Jesus to be Messiah, making this transition from Jesus as earthly king to heavenly king.

Perhaps the disciple’s comment about the majesty of the temple was an idle comment. Perhaps it was “wow, when Jesus comes into his Kingdom, that will be ours!”

We are late in Jesus’ ministry. He’s taught on the Kingdom of God, he’s prophesied of his death, but the reality is the disciples won’t completely get it until after the crucifixion and resurrection.

**ILL:** If you have kids that are teens or older, have you ever given them last minute instructions before they left for a weekend trip, or even more before going away to school, or leaving house for good? Now remember! …

In our family we have a **Grandma** who still does it and we’re in our mid 40’s!

**Why do we do that?**
Well first **we care**. But also our **life experience** helps us see things that our kids may not see.
We want to **prepare them** so that WHEN a situation may arise, they are not caught off guard and are prepared to handle the situation.

*There will be wars and rumors of wars . . . Only the beginning.*
He implicitly answered the disciples question of what but without a when. But the way he answered also showed that the signs themselves were not the most important concern.

Jesus was preparing his disciples that many hardships would exist between that day and the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Let’s look closer at Jesus’ warning:
- Jesus warned of false prophets and false messiahs.
- “There will be wars and rumors of wars but that is not the end.”
- These are merely birth pangs.

I heard a sermon once that gave the best understanding of this analogy. Birth pangs increase in frequency and intensity as the birth nears.

Likewise, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines, these will always exist but will increase in frequency and intensity.

Jesus’ prophecy begins with destruction of temple in 70 AD but if you read the rest of Mark 13, it also includes the prophecy of the end times.

Jesus’ warning was not about what or when . .

It was for believers, Life won’t always be easy! There will be trials. There will be wars and rumors of wars.

Don’t be dismayed or deceived.

The intent is not to predict the apocalyptic event but rather to be ready for the event and never forget that God is in control.

Believers should not be dismayed when persecution comes, we should not be dismayed when the world seems to become more evil rather than more holy.

We should stand firm.

It’s easy when evil prevails to be deceived that God in no longer in control or has forgotten us.

We look at world events like the tragedy in France Friday night and wonder about evil prevailing. It’s a natural thought.
As we approach Advent and Christmas, I’m reminded of one of my favorite carols. It’s a somber tune, the antithesis of Joy to the World.

**I heard the Bells on Christmas Day.**
The lyrics originate from a poem penned by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1864. The nation is in the throes of war and Longfellow’s wife had been killed in 1861 in the early days of the war. In fact the original poem had two verses specific to the Civil War that were omitted in the carol.

A familiar refrain of the carol is “peace on earth goodwill to men.” But it’s the last two verses that speak to the dilemma of war and God.

*And in despair I bowed my head*
*There is no peace on Earth I said*
*For hate is strong and mocks the song*
*Of peace on Earth good will to men.*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep.*
*“God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!*
*The wrong shall fail, the Right prevail*
*With peace on earth, good will to men.*

When we hear of wars and rumors of wars – God is still in control. He will prevail.

We cannot take world events and predict end times. Jesus said not to be alarmed.

We should not listen to those who try to deceive us with false teachings or who twist God’s word.

What can we can do is stand the watch.

**ILL: Stand the watch??**

**Who has stood the watch?** Standing the watch is an integral part of Naval tradition, so much so that upon retirement, we ceremonially announce to the retiree that he or she stands relieved and those still serving have the watch.

As believers, we must stand the watch.

You don’t successfully stand the watch by panicking at trouble. You do so by knowing procedures and making wise decisions.
We must know what we believe. We must stand firm to the truth of the Gospel and our belief that Jesus is Lord and that he will come again. We must not lose heart as evil seems to prevail in the world.

I can’t stand here today and tell you that a false prophet will teach x,y, or z. I can tell you what Jesus spoke as the truth.

We protect ourselves from being deceived by studying his Word and knowing the truth.

Then, when we encounter false teachings, we know the standard for comparison and know the standard for evaluation of truth.

Do not be concerned with what or when, Stand the Watch for false teachings that you might stand strong until the Day of our Lord.