

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Mark 13:1-11 on November 1, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: It's the End of the World...And I Feel Fine**

**Today's Focus: It's Who You Know**

**"Stick With the Word of God"**

Today we're starting a new series about the end times. This is kind of fitting in a non-spiritual sort of way because as it turns out these are the end times for us as a church here at Showtime Cinema! This will probably be the last month having church here—five more Sundays in fact. God-willing we'll be getting occupancy in our new ministry center towards the end of November which will give us a little time to move in, get comfortable, and get ready. December 6<sup>th</sup> is our target date now for holding our first services in our new beautiful ministry center.

And what a beautiful building it is! It is the culmination of years of hard work, generous gifts, and many prayers. And there are some very nice architectural features like the orange glazed brick on the outside wall of the entrance. There are some beautiful countertops, shiny floors, impressive lights, and some gorgeous woodwork. Still to be done are some things like wrapping the front entrance in beautiful cedar wood.

Mr. Bill, one of our Builders For Christ friends who helped build our church all summer long, stopped by yesterday and after walking around observing many of the finishing touches he said with a big smile on his face, "Even in my imagination it didn't look this beautiful!" It was sure rewarding to hear him say this with a sense of pride and accomplishment. Friends, we've built a spacious building for a little church that started just 9 years ago from scratch. It's going to be a wonderful ministry center. It's a beautiful building we can certainly be proud of. But you know what? So was the temple of the Jews in Jerusalem.

In fact the temple in Jerusalem was even more magnificent than our ministry center. It had huge stone blocks even larger than the concrete slabs that make up the walls in our new worship space. King Herod's rebuilt temple in Jerusalem was one of the most impressive man-



made structures of the ancient world. Its beautiful white marble stones with gold ornamentation reached up to 100 ft high {pic}. And even more than us the Jews had reasons to prize it and be proud of it. It was actually in a sense their pride and joy. Their temple was the one and only place where the true God was to be worshipped, where the sacrifices foreshadowing the coming of the Messiah were to be offered, and *the* place to which everyone was to regularly go and

gather. But then here's what Jesus says. Listen to what happened:

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

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

Well leave it to Jesus, huh. He sure has a way of getting people’s attention, doesn’t he? But imagine if he said this about our brand new ministry center. Imagine if he said, “Do you see this great building here on Loomis Rd? It’s all coming down. Not a truss will be left in the ceiling. Not a cabinet is going to be left hanging. Not one concrete wall is going to stand. And none of the colors that you picked out are going to be distinguishable anymore.” How would you feel? Well I think I would want to ask Jesus a few questions, wouldn’t you? And that’s exactly what his disciples are going to do. We’ll hear them in just a minute.

But first I think we should consider what Jesus is getting at. Friends, what is it that really matters in your busy life? What do you prize and value above all? What will you cling to when the end draws near?

And what is it in the life of our church that really matters if not our brand new building? What is it that will truly endure if not the work of our hands and all our hard earned accomplishments? What is that makes any house of worship—whether a soccer club with its open bar along the wall, or a movie theater with its big screen and comfy chairs, or a cathedral with its vaulted ceilings and exquisite stained glass, or a temple with its marble columns and colonnades—what is it that makes it worthy? Well it’s only this: The true Word of God. That’s what truly matters in the end in your life and in our church. That’s what makes a house of worship worthy. It’s the Word of God—especially the Gospel message which at its heart and core is the good news about Jesus Christ our Savior who came and lived, died, and conquered death for us and our salvation!

The apostle Peter, quoting the prophet Isaiah, once said, *“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever”* (1 Peter 1:24-25). So friends, that’s why today we want to take to heart the words of Jesus so that we over the long haul of life we can **stick with the Word of God!**

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

So these are the questions that Jesus’ disciples asked. They wanted to know, “When’s this destruction of our temple going to happen and how are we going to know when’s it about to all

go down?” Well you’d want to know this too if you were them, wouldn’t you? So in the rest of the chapter in the verses that follow, Jesus gives them answers. He tells them more about the destruction of the temple which in fact did happen just as Jesus predicted. In 70 A.D. the Roman army led by Titus the general came into Jerusalem and leveled the temple. This is historical fact. We know from history that it was a time of great tribulation for the Jewish people just as Jesus predicted here. The Jews had largely rejected the gift God gave them in Jesus so God was going to reject them and the temple they trusted in.

But Jesus in this chapter is also pointing to something beyond the destruction of Jerusalem. He is teaching us about something far more universal than the end of the Jewish temple. He’s also got in mind the end of the world here. He’s talking here in this chapter about the destruction of the Jewish temple, but he’s also teaching us about the destruction of all that is temporary so that you and I would cling to what is eternal, what truly matters, what will endure until the time of time. You see Jesus wants us to cling to that which, if we stick with it no matter what happens, we will be just fine. So **stick with the Word of God.**

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. <sup>7</sup> When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup> 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.*

We need to stick with the Word of God because Jesus says, “Watch out.” “*Watch out that no one deceives you.*” It’s good to be reminded of this today I think because we live in a world where there are a lot of voices competing for our attention and a lot of pressure to give in. There is social media and movies and music. There are message boards and blogs and yes, some people still read them...books! There are lots of messages being communicated out there in the world. The question is, Are you aware of how you’re being influenced by them? What do you read? What do you watch? What media saturates your brain? Who are your friends who have your ear? In other words who is teaching you, teaching your kids, subtly influencing you with their ideas, their philosophies, their morality, their values? Jesus says, “*Watch out that no one deceives you.*” Friends, how are you being deceived by the ways and messages of the world?

In these verses Jesus offers a stark reality view of the world and not a utopian fantasy view about the world. He says that in the end times there will be lots of religious deception, false paths, false prophets, and false hope. This is certainly true in our world today where religion is presented as if it’s all up for grabs. Just pick your religion, or none at all if you prefer, like you’d fill your plate at Old Country Buffer—a little of this and a little of that or none at all. But then

there's Jesus who say, "Watch out." And there's only one way to watch out and that's to **stick with the true Word of God.**

Martin Luther is an example of someone in history who learned to do this even when it was hard. Today we're celebrating what's known as the Lutheran Reformation which was basically a return to the Word of God as found in the Bible. Because in Martin Luther's day, the Catholic church was deceiving the people. They were teaching that instead of just sticking with the Word of God in the Bible, you needed to obey the words of other people—especially the Pope. *His* word was elevated over and above *God's* Word. And the reason why this was especially deceptive was because the church with the Pope at its head taught that to get into heaven you needed to do good works. You had to try and be good enough to earn eternal life.

Now this maybe sounds kind of innocent until you start to ask, "Well how good is good enough?" and you realize that you can't ever be good enough. You can't, I can't—not without either lowering God's standard, which by the way is perfection, or by elevating ourselves up to the place of God. But fortunately Martin Luther had the opportunity to study the Bible and then to translate the Bible so that others could also discover what it really says about how you get to heaven. It's not by your good works. It's purely and completely by God's grace. It doesn't depend on you or your best efforts. It depends on Jesus Christ and his perfect obedience. Friends, if you don't want to be deceived, **stick with the Word of God.** Jesus went on to tell his disciples,

<sup>9</sup> *"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.* <sup>10</sup> *And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.* <sup>11</sup> *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.*

Jesus again paints what sounds like an ominous picture. The last days will include religious deception, conflict between nations, earthquakes and famines, and persecution of Christians. Do you see this going in the world today? Absolutely you will, especially if you filter out the bias of many in the American media, and take a global perspective on what's happening. We could spend all morning talking about specific examples. And we could sit here and try and predict what we think may or may not happen in our own country in our time. But that's all kind of beside the point. Because the main point is that in the midst of this gloominess and this chaos and all this uncertainty, what does Jesus say? *And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.*

In other words the gospel will continue to spread out over the entire world even as we come to the end of the world. How will this happen? Believers will witness. Preachers will preach. Christians will testify to the grace of God that comes to us by faith in the Son of God—Jesus Christ our Savior. Jesus told his disciples, *On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them*. What is a witness? Someone who shares their testimony about Jesus. In this case with Jesus' apostles it was their eye-witness testimony about Jesus—who he is and what he has done. It is their eye-witness testimony that we now have recorded for us in the Bible.

This whole sermon series is called, "It's the end of the world...and I feel fine." Does that make any of you think about the REM song... "It's the end of the world as we know it"? It's an interesting, catchy song. The lyrics come fast and furious. It gives you the sense of chaos going on and if you pay attention to the words it sounds sort of gloomy. And yet in listening to it you can't help but feel optimistic and somehow cheerful. The song is cynical yet somehow upbeat and catchy at the same time. Well the thing is, friends, we've got an even better reason to be optimistic and cheerful than a happy tune. We've got a legitimate reason not to worry. We've got the truth of God's Word which is the gospel.

The word "gospel" means good news. But it's not just any good news. It's specifically the good news about Jesus Christ. This is the message that is at the heart of the Bible. It's the message Martin Luther rediscovered for the church and it's what makes our Lutheran church special. The hub of Christianity is Jesus Christ and what he has done. You see the gospel is not "Do something for Jesus." The gospel is "Jesus has done everything for you." The gospel isn't that God loves bad people who try and become good. The gospel rather is that God declares bad people righteous when they receive through faith in Christ the forgiveness of their sins. This is what God's Word actually gives. This is what Baptism actually seals. This is what Holy Communion actually conveys. The forgiveness of all your sins—full and free—because at the cross Jesus assumed responsibility for our guilt so that by faith God would credit to you and me the gift of his perfect righteousness.

Therefore friends, no matter how chaotic or gloomy life gets, **stick with the word of God!** In contrast to everything that is false, Jesus is the truth. He is the ender of wars, the uniter of people, the calmer of strife, the bringer of peace, the keeper of promises, and the savior of the world. So stick with the Word of God, the gospel, and through it Jesus will stick with you.

We pray: Heavenly Father, the power of your word has broken through the sinful darkness of my heart. By your grace, Jesus is my Savior. Help me to calmly cling to the promises of your word in the gloom of this sinful world. Invigorate me by your Spirit to share that same word that saves me so that by your power it saves others. In Jesus' name. Amen.