

Endure to the End

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Date: 26 February 2023

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[0 : 0 0] My name's Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one's so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection, and if you're anything like me, especially when I was growing up, you might feel at times like when you read through the Gospels, there's just this random set of stories, and it's unclear how all of it links together or connects. Jesus says one thing, and then He says another. He does one thing and then moves on to another town, and it can be easy to get sort of lost in those details and forget the big picture of what's happening, and so as we come to this passage this morning, we're going to be looking at one of the most challenging sections of Scripture, Jesus' instructions on the

Mount of Olives to His disciples. I want to just remind us where we are at in this story in the Gospel. We are in Holy Week right now, which is the week leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection.

We started that before Christmas in Mark chapter 11. So Mark chapter 11, the Holy Week begins. We have Jesus coming in to Jerusalem from Bethany. He's commuting each day. In fact, we're going to see Him heading out towards Bethany as He gives these instructions, and on Sunday, Palm Sunday, He comes in, remember riding a donkey. He has folks who are waving palm branches as He comes in. Then Sunday evening, Jesus visits the temple. He sees what's being done there, preparing Him to come back on Monday.

Monday, Jesus commutes in again from Bethany. On His way, He curses a fig tree. Then He cleanses the temple. He tries to write what He saw the evening before. Okay, so that takes us through Monday. Then Tuesday, Tuesday morning, He comes in, the disciples see that withered fig tree, and they say, oh, wow, look at that. And Jesus says, look, if you have faith, you can move mountains. And it's then that Jesus begins this day of instruction in the temple. In other words, we have been in Tuesday of Holy Week since before Christmas. Because Jesus continues to teach, and we're working slowly through His teaching. And so now, here's where we're at in the story. Jesus has finished His day of teaching on Tuesday. He's commuting back to Bethany, which is east of Jerusalem, where He is staying during Holy Week.

And as He makes His way out of the temple, that's where we find Jesus giving these instructions to His disciples. Now, I want to say these are His final instructions. It's not completely true. Right at the end of the Gospel of Mark, He's going to give them a version of the Great Commission. He's going to tell them, instruct them about the Lord's Supper in the next chapter. But this is the last extended instruction Jesus has with His disciples. It's His final instructions we're going to have before the Last Supper, and then Gethsemane's prayer, and then His arrest. So things are going to start to speed up very quickly for us when it comes to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. And so there's a sense in which what we're coming up against here is Jesus' last main instruction to His disciples before His death. It makes sense then. It fits the narrative that He's going to tell us what He tells us here. He's going to tell the disciples what they need to know, what they need to remember between Jesus' first coming and His second coming. He's going to give them instructions about how to live and what to expect between His first advent and His second advent. It's important to remember that because this is a passage full of bad news. Jesus says, guess what? You're going to encounter false teachers. You're going to encounter wars and earthquakes and famine, and you're going to encounter persecution.

[4 : 34] The question for us then is, how do we make it through to the end? In this section this morning, the very last verse, verse 13, Jesus says, and you will be hated by all for my namesake, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. And so that's our question this morning. How can we be the one who endures to the end, a people who endure to the end as we face these many things, false teachers, wars, and persecution? It's with that introduction that I invite you to turn with me now to God's Word. You can open up your Bible. You can open up your phone. You can look in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that He has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead He's given us His Word to show us the way to go. That's why we read now Mark chapter 13, starting at verse 1. And as He came out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him,

Look, teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings. And Jesus said to him, Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. Verse 3. And as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked Him privately, Tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished? And Jesus began to say to them, See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, I am He, and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places.

There will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. Verse 9. But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child.

And children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this passage of God's word. Our father in heaven, we thank you again that you prepare us for the future.

As any good and loving father does, you haven't abandoned us or left us to work it out or figure it out on our own, but instead you give us instruction and you give us promises. Promises that you'll be with us and give us the words to speak. Promises that those who endure will be saved. And so we ask that you would do that this morning, that you would instruct us and shape us and form us by your word.

[8 : 25] That you would speak clearly to us in words that we can understand. That there would be earning clarity in a passage that often causes confusion and questions.

Most of all, we ask that you'd show us Jesus, that we would see his glory and his beauty, that we would grow in our love for him and our obedience to him. We ask this in his name. Amen.

I mentioned just a few minutes ago that we are ending Tuesday in Holy Week, and it's been an incredibly busy day for Jesus. He's been spending almost the entire day calling out the religious leaders and their hypocrisy. All the way back to Tuesday morning was when we saw that the fig tree had been withered, which was a sign for God's condemnation over the fruitless religious system of the temple. In chapter 12, we had this parable of the tenants who killed the son of the vineyard owner, which was meant to be an illustration of the wickedness of the Jewish leaders.

That they were left to watch after God's house, and yet they're hostile to God's son. Then Jesus encounters these three questions, the first two at least, which are meant to trap him.

The question about paying taxes to Caesar, the question about marriage in heaven, and then the final question about the greatest commandment. And then it was the last two weeks that we saw this contrast between hypocrisy and true devotion. So two weeks ago, we had Jesus talk about the hypocrisy of the scribes who love to be seen wearing fancy clothes, but actually behind the scenes, they're devouring widows' houses. And then last week, this positive example of true faith, this widow who can't even enter the temple complex beyond the first courtyard, and yet she is the one who is actually close to God.

[10 : 28] I review all that so that we can understand Jesus' statement here at the beginning of chapter 13. This is the climax, in a sense, of everything that's come before. Jesus has condemned the religious leaders and their system over and over again. And so there's a certain irony in verse 1 when one of his disciples says, look, teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings.

Yeah, this place is totally corrupt. You've had to curse it because it's like a tree that produces no fruit. Its leaders are devouring poor people and widows. They're killing the son of the vineyard on your... But isn't it a beautiful building? Look how great it is. And of course, this sort of confirms Jesus' point earlier about the fig tree, right? The fig tree was all leaf and no figs. It was all external appearance, but no substance. This disciple sets Jesus up to lay down his final mic drop of his condemnation of the temple. Verse 2, do you see these great buildings? There will be not left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. In other words, Jesus is saying, my work here is finished. The time of the temple is over. Not only will they face the condemnation I just gave them all day, but they will face real physical destruction. Jesus is not just criticizing the temple and its religious system. He is bringing it to an end. It will be not just dismantled by Jesus' words. It will be physically dismantled stone by stone.

And so this is in a sense the close of Jesus' criticism of the religious leaders in the temple. He spent time after time teaching after teaching, illustration after illustration, parable after parable, pointing out how impotent and fruitless it is. And now he lays down the final judgment. It won't stand anymore. That lays the foundation for Jesus following on teaching here. It's this question that brings on the instruction that he gives. Verse 3, we see that they are continuing their commute back to Bethany, which is east of Jerusalem. That's where Jesus is spending the night during this time. And on the way out of the temple and towards Bethany, you cross the Mount of Olives. So we see what's happening here is that Jesus is sitting on this mountain with his disciples, and they have this glorious and perfect view of the temple. They can see it as the sun is setting, and they're looking out on the beauty that his disciples have just named. And as they look at this temple and they remember what Jesus said, their question makes complete sense. When is it that this temple will be dismantled stone by stone?

In fact, they asked two questions. Verse 4, question of when and the question of what. We will come back to those questions of when and what in future weeks. In this section, though, Jesus doesn't really get at those questions. He has something else he wants to talk about. And he does get to them in a certain sense. Verse 10, right? He says, well, in terms of when, it's not going to happen until the gospel is preached to all the nations. But he has something that's more pressing on his mind than what the disciples want to know. Now, at this point, we need to pause for a second and talk about the difficulty of this passage.

And the difficulty is this. They are asking Jesus about the literal destruction of the temple. Jesus has told them, hey, these stones are literally going to be taken down stone by stone.

[14:39] So their question is about the destruction of the temple, which we know happens later in 70 AD by the Romans. That is the immediate context of this passage, is the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the first century. So that's true on the one hand. On the other hand, Jesus talks about much more than that. He talks about his return, his second advent. And so we have two things that are going on at the same time. Jesus is talking about an event that is close, 70 AD, and he's also talking about an event that's far away, which is his second advent, his return to the earth. And he's talking about these, in a sense, both at the same time. To understand what's going on here, one illustration that I like is looking at mountains from a far distance. If you're looking at a mountain range, you know that some of those mountains are closer than the others. But when you're so far away, it all appears in one line, right? In a sense, that's what's happening here. Jesus is talking about a mountain range.

There's different distances. There's different events. But we see them, in a sense, all at once. And in fact, that's even true in this section. Verse 9, he says you're going to be beaten in synagogues. As a Christian in 2023, you don't need to be worried about being beaten in synagogues.

That's going to be true of first century Christians looking to the destruction of the temple. Now we can apply that principle broadly and say, yeah, we're still going to face persecution in this life. On the other hand, the very next verse, verse 10, he says, hey, it's not going to happen until the gospel's been preached to all the nations. Clearly talking about something that's beyond 70 AD.

Now, if you're lost at this point in all the technicalities, simply the point is this. Jesus is talking about two coming judgments. One's the judgment on the temple. The second is his full and final judgment on the earth.

And so there's going to be certain things here that apply more to one of those than the other. Certain things apply both. Our goal is going to be not to get lost in the weeds, but to see the principles that apply to us as people who live between Jesus' first coming and his second coming.

[16:52] With all of that being said, Jesus tells them about three things they need to be wary of. He tells them about three things they need to watch out for. First, false teachers.

Second, general suffering. Third, persecution. So first, false teachers. Second, general suffering. And third, persecution for the name of Jesus Christ.

First, we see the first of those in verses five through six, which is warning them about false teachers. When I was growing up as a child, my parents had a lot of conversations with us about what we would today call stranger danger, which is that you need to be careful with adults you don't know and what they ask of you and how they interact with you. And one of the things my parents talked with us about is the fact that there might be an adult who comes to you at some point and says, your parents have sent me. They're in great trouble.

You need to come with me now so we can go visit them. And so my parents said, you know, they might be sent by us, but they also might not be sent by us. And so here's what we're going to do.

If we ever send an adult to get you, we're going to tell that adult the password. And so you ask them, oh, you were sent by my mom. Well, what's the password?

[18 : 13] And the password was Captain Dement. And if that means nothing to you, that's the complete point. It was an obscure reference that I'm not going to explain this morning because it's neither relevant, nor do we have the time, but it would never be something that a stranger would guess.

And so there was a confirmation. If someone comes in our name, we're going to give them a token so that you know they are authentic. Jesus is warning his disciples here, you also need to be wary of stranger danger.

There are going to be people who come claiming to be in my name when they don't. In fact, verse 6 here sums up, my parents fear many will come in my name saying I am he and will lead many astray.

Now, there could have been a situation in which my parents did need to send someone, right? Jesus is telling them here, there will not be that type of situation.

There will not be that type of situation. No one should be coming in my name. And so the command here for this is in verse 5, see that no one leads you astray.

[19 : 30] Now, you may have noticed I said the first point was about false teachers, but Jesus doesn't say false teachers here. He's talking instead about false messiahs, those who claim to come in Jesus' name.

And in fact, in the first century, there were many false messiahs who appeared claiming to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Our challenge today is not so much false messiahs, but we can expand the application, the principle here to include false teachers.

Those who come and say that they claim to speak for God, to have a new revelation for him, to be some kind of new prophet with new information. There is something about cults and prophecy that appeal to the human heart, the human psyche.

To know that somehow you're on the inside with insider knowledge is incredibly alluring and tempting. And so Jesus is saying, no, don't love the insider knowledge.

Don't desire to be in the inside group or the cool kids club. There is no such thing. There is no more representative who's going to come in my name.

[20 : 39] Continue with the plan. Don't look for anyone else to come. Anyone else who claims to be a prophet for me is false.

And we could think of religions that exist today, even here in Colorado Springs, that claim to be a new revelation from God. Something that adds to what we've already received.

The application then for us is pretty simple. Don't listen to modern day prophets. Don't listen to anyone who claims to have a new or special revelation from God.

Jesus is the final word. He's spoken to us. He's given us everything we need to know. In fact, that's what Hebrews chapter 1 says.

It says, long ago at many times, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in this last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

[21 : 42] Jesus is the final prophet. There are no others. Don't be pulled aside by someone claiming to have new or special information.

The next thing Jesus warns his disciples about is just general suffering that will happen in the world. Verses 7 and 8, he tells them, There are going to be wars and rumors of wars.

Nation will rise against nation. Kingdom against kingdom. Earthquakes and famines. Of course, this comes as no surprise to us, right? In 2023, we can find examples of all of those things.

There is this general suffering that exists in the world. Jesus here instructs them about how to think through that. There's a variety of ways the Bible gives us to think about suffering in this life.

This passage gives us one in verse 8. That is that we think of these sufferings as the beginning of birth pains. The beginning of birth pains signal that new life is coming.

[22 : 47] It has not yet arrived. And that pain is part of the process, an inherent portion of bringing that new life to bear.

And so God is telling us, Jesus is telling us here, that when we see the wars and the famines and the earthquakes, we know it is part of God's work to prepare the world for his return.

God is at work in those things, preparing us and bringing forth the new heavens and the new earth. But it's the beginning of birth pains.

It's the beginning of the process. Now for me to stand here and say, hey, suffering in this world, it's part of God at work to bring the new world to bear may sound to you like pie in the sky pastor talk.

Oh, don't worry about that suffering. God's using it somehow. And so I want to dial in a little bit more specifically and talk about the way in which God is using these sufferings to bring his purposes to bear.

[23 : 55] As some of you may remember, a few years ago, as a church, we handed out copies of John Piper's book, Coronavirus and Christ. And he talks about one specific suffering, the suffering of COVID-19, and talks about the ways in which God is using it.

So that's one kind of suffering, but there are principles that he draws out that we can use for all these different types of suffering. He gives one, which is awakening us for the second coming.

Suffering is meant to be a reminder that Jesus is coming back. In fact, that's part of the purpose of this passage. When we see famines and earthquakes and wars, we can say, oh, yes, that is part of the plan.

Jesus told us that's going to happen before he comes again. Jumping forward a couple of weeks, what we're going to talk about, let's be ready and prepared. Suffering reminds God's people to prepare for his return.

It's not the only thing it does, though. It also is meant to lead people to repentance. Suffering in the world presents a small picture of God's ultimate judgment.

[25 : 07] It's meant to remind us that we live in a world where God's judgment is real, and it comes to bear on us. And so that small J judgment is meant to awaken us to a capital J judgment, that it would lead people who do not know Christ to repentance.

That's part of how God is using suffering to prepare the world. Now, I'm not going to go through all of them, but the other one he points to is persecution is used in the Bible to spread missionaries.

The example he gives is in Acts 8, when there's a great persecution in Jerusalem, and it spreads the early church throughout the Mediterranean. And so we see the specific ways in which God is using these sufferings as the beginning of birth pains to bring the new world into existence.

He's using it to remind his people of his second coming, that they would be prepared. He's using it to provide a picture of judgment, so that those who do not know him would be called to repentance.

He's using it to spread his witnesses throughout the earth, so that verse 10 can be fulfilled. It'll be not until the gospel's been preached to all the nations.

[26 : 24] In 2020, when we were going through COVID-19, and racial tension and civil unrest, I received a text from someone from a previous life, who asked me, hey, with all these things going on, it seems like the end times are around us.

Is Jesus coming back soon? And I replied, what we'll talk about in a couple weeks, Mark chapter 13, 32, not even Jesus knows the day or the hour.

And so, hey, we can't claim to know things that Jesus doesn't know. Now, I didn't say this in that text, but maybe I would say it now, but in a sense, you're thinking in the right way. The purpose of these things is to remind us of eternal realities.

If this brings to your mind Jesus' second coming, then the purpose has been accomplished. It is meant to wake us up.

But, verse 7, do not be alarmed. There's a difference in the way that Christians think about these things.

[27 : 34] And so, Jesus is giving us instruction along the way. He's telling us how to handle each of these things. Verse 5, false teachers, don't be led astray. Verse 7, sufferings, do not be alarmed.

When we were going through the book of Daniel, remember I told you that as you read the newspaper and you see the events around the world, the overarching thing that you should think about and see is God and his throne on control of the world.

This adds another step to that. It's not just that as you read the newspaper and see suffering as you experience it personally, it's not just that you see God in control on his throne over the world, but that you also know that that king is working out his plan.

This is a step in a larger strategy. This is not arbitrary or out of God's control, but instead he is using each and every one of these pieces to bring the new heavens and the new earth to completion.

And so that realization is what allows verse 7 to be true of us, that we are not alarmed because we know this is what's supposed to happen. It's part of the plan, not the end of the story, not outside of God's control.

[28 : 53] The famine, the wars, and the earthquakes are a part of his process. And so Jesus has warned us about two things, false teachers, verse 5, don't be led astray.

General suffering, verse 7, do not be alarmed. And then verses 9 through 13, they're going to face persecution, suffering specifically for their loyalty to Jesus Christ.

We see verse 9, they're going to be beaten. Verse 12, there's going to be family turmoil. And then in verse 13, it gets even worse, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.

Don't just be prepared for false teachers. Don't just be prepared for general suffering. Know that your life as a Christian will involve suffering specifically because you follow me.

And of course, we know that this continues around the world. We pray for it in our services, that the church around the world would be strengthened as they face persecution.

[30 : 07] We can look at the history of the church and see that what Jesus has talked about here has happened and will continue to happen. This also is part of the plan.

In fact, we can see it is connecting to verse 10. What will necessarily happen for the gospel to be preached to all nations? Well, it's going to include those who preach that gospel facing persecution.

But just like in the past, two warnings, Jesus here also does not leave us to wonder about how to respond.

In fact, in this one, he gives us not one command, but two commands. Verse 9, he says, be on your guard. In other words, Jesus is saying, don't be caught off guard.

Don't be surprised. Don't be shocked when persecution happens to you. Be aware. That's part of what it means to be a Christian. Could be a small persecution.

[31 : 10] Could be a slight or an insult. It could be a large persecution. It could be that you're beaten or killed or thrown into prison. When that happens, just like with the first two challenges, you know that's part of the plan.

Don't be alarmed. Be on guard. Know that that is part and parcel of the Christian life. But then he gives us not just one command, but a second one here in verse 11.

Not just that we would not be caught off guard or taken by surprise, but also do not be anxious. When those things come, because it is part of God's plan, because he's working it out in the world, and he sits as the king on the throne over all of the earth, he has planned it all out.

He is not going to leave you helpless and alone. Instead, the promise here is a promise that we can claim.

Say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Jesus then is saying, My child, you will face persecution, and I will be with you.

[32 : 29] Not just to comfort you and encourage you, but in fact, to speak through you. And so there's no need for you to be anxious. In fact, we could apply this to all three of these.

Don't be anxious when false teachers come. You don't need to be confused. You know my word is your foundation. Don't be anxious when wars and earthquakes and famines come. You know the end of the story.

You know this is part of my plan. Don't be anxious when persecution happens, because I will be with you and I will provide for you. When you're pulled into courts, I will give you the words to say.

Even more than that, he gives us the motivation. Verse 13, The one who endures to the end will be saved. No matter what happens in this life, no matter what you face and go through, 1 Peter chapter 1 is true.

There's an inheritance waiting for you that's imperishable and undefiled. The things that I've prepared for you, the things you have to look forward to and to wait for, they cannot be touched by the suffering of this world.

[33 : 46] You have something infinitely more valuable and secure. Endure. And so hang on. Endure. Stay to the end.

And of course, that call to endurance is not a call to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. It's a call to embrace the power that God already gives.

It's the power he's given through his instruction here. Power of knowledge and information. The power of knowing his plan of being able to trust it. And it's also his power and his promise to provide.

To provide words when we need them during persecution. And most of all, his promise in verse 13, that he will save the one who endures to the end. And so it's Jesus' instruction and his promises that sustain us and guide us as we are the ones who endure.

I told you this story two years ago when we were in Daniel chapter eight, and I'm going to tell it to you again. And it's the story of the Stockdale paradox. And the Stockdale paradox was given by this man named Jim Collins in his book, Good to Great.

[35 : 01] And it's about Admiral Jim Stockdale. Who was the highest ranking military officer in Hanoi Hilton. It's the name for this camp, this prisoner camp. He was a prisoner of war in Vietnam.

And he was in prison there for eight years. Eight years he suffered the torture and indignities of living as a POW during the Vietnam War.

And so Jim Collins came to interview him and said, hey, how did you make it through this time? How did you endure to the end? How did you survive those eight years? And who was it that didn't make it?

And he said, well, it's easy. The people who didn't make it were the optimists. The optimists would always say, well, we'll be out in a month. We'll be out by Christmas. We'll be out by next year. And eventually, Stockdale says, they died of a broken heart.

And that's where he gave birth to this principle that it is mistaken to underestimate what there is to face. But it also needs to be faced with great hope.

[36 : 07] And so he has this famous quote that's on page seven of your worship guide. God's people face the brutal facts of their current reality.

God's people face the brutal facts of their current reality.

They persevere until the end because they do have the faith that they will endure. Not a pie in the sky faith, but one that is rested on God's provision, his presence, and his promises.

We face the brutal facts of false teachers and wars and famines and persecutions. And we know that Mark 13, 13 is correct.

And you will be hated by all for my namesake, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word which comforts us and guides us.

[37 : 20] And we thank you for your heart, the heart of a father that instructs us and encourages us. We ask that you would cause these truths and these commands to live in our hearts and our minds as we face the challenges of this world that we would never give up, that it would be true of us that we are not led astray, that we are not alarmed, that we're not anxious.

Because we know that you give us everything we need to face the challenges ahead. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.