



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 13: 1-13

Mark

"The Birth Pangs"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Howard. Our passage this morning is Mark chapter 13, and we will look at the first 13 verses. Mark 13, verses 1 through 13. Follow along with me in your Bibles as I read.

And as He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down."

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

"But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is

the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we pray?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great privilege that we have to come together and to study the Scriptures, to open this great chapter in the gospel of Mark, and consider events that are yet to come. And to be reminded of the great truth, the great hope that we have that Your Son will leave His throne at Your side and come back to this earth, and establish His kingdom, that the events of history are moving toward that great event, and that History will not conclude in defeat, but will conclude triumphantly at Your hand, that You will bring Your kingdom. What men fail to accomplish, what men fail to establish with all of their programs, their great frontiers and great societies and all of the attempts that they have made to bring utopia on earth, what men long for as those projects suggest, and yet what they cannot accomplish, You will bring in a far better form than anything we could hope to develop in our sinful condition.

And so, we praise You, Father, for the words that we will study this week and in the weeks to come, and the great truths that they present to us, that we have a certain hope. Not only the hope of heaven, but the hope of a kingdom to come, and the hope of an eternal kingdom. And so, Father, we pray You'd bless our time of study. May it be encouraging. May it give us perspective, which is our Lord's great purpose in this, to give us proper perspective on life. Help is in view of the things that we consider this morning. Help us to live in light of them, to not live for simply the moment, and not make our plans for this life alone, but to make our greater plans by what we see here, and according to what is yet to come, and help us to live for the future, to live for eternity, and make our lives count.

We pray You'd bless us in that way, Father. Bless us spiritually. We pray You'd build us up in the faith. We pray for other churches that are meeting throughout the city and throughout this land, throughout the world on this Lord's day. We pray that You'd build them up in the faith as they consider the Scriptures and

consider Your word. We pray that You would fit us all for the week ahead, that we might live as faithful servants.

We pray Lord for our church in a material way as well. We certainly have our spiritual needs, and those are the fundamental needs that we have, but we have many physical needs as well, and we remember those names that are listed on the calendar of concern. Those who are going to be undergoing surgery, those who are sick and in need of healing. Those who may be grieving over the loss of a loved one. Others who are in financial need. Lord, there are so many needs that we have. And all of these things ultimately Lord, we must say, come from You. They come from Your hand, and You have a gracious hand. And so, You use them in our lives to make us like Your Son, and You use them in the life of a church to cause us to seek to help one another. May we do that, Lord, may we not be indifferent to the needs of those in our congregation. May we use our time, if that is what is needed, for our financial assistance, if that is what is needed, to help. Help us to see that this is not simply a collection of people, but this is a body of people. This is an organism, so to speak. This is a group of people who are linked together, united in Jesus Christ, bound by the Holy Spirit, and that we have responsibilities to one another. And the needs that those in our congregation have are opportunities for us to be of service. Help us to be of service, Father, and we pray Your blessing upon those who are in difficulty. Give encouragement, give perspective, give healing, make provision. We pray.

We pray for our nation as well. We remember our leaders, those whom You have appointed over us. We are instructed to pray for the king. We do that. We pray for our president, and his cabinet, and the Senate, the Congress, all the judges that are in authority over us. We pray for our local leaders. We ask that Lord, You would bless them with wisdom. And may we live in days of peace, knowing that those days will someday end. They must end, before Your Son returns. We pray that if it please You, You would give us days of peace, that the gospel might go forth, and that we might serve You well. May we avail ourselves of which You've given us. The Scriptures that we have in our hands, the time that we are given. May we use it all in a way that's pleasing to You and bring glory to Your Son. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] This morning, we begin a section of Mark's gospel which is also contained in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, which is known as the Olivet Discourse. It's a prophetic discourse. Our Lord's teaching on future events. And for that reason, it is particularly interesting to us. Few subjects that stir people's interests as much as the subject of prophecy; people want to know about the future. I suppose it's always been that way. The ancient peoples of the East had their magicians that studied the stars to determine the course of future events. The Greeks, and the Romans had their oracles and their soothsayers. Even today, there is a wide interest in horoscopes and crystal balls. All of which we would condemn, but which does seem to suggest that it's natural for people to want to peer into the future.

And so, we approach a passage like this with real interest. And yet, we also approach it with caution because of the many abuses and excesses that have occurred in regard to the prophetic word. Excess is committed by what one writer calls "newspaper exigency," men who try to interpret world affairs by biblical prophecy. We've seen a lot of that in our own day. Very recently, I think, we have seen literature that's come out and heard prognostications about the end coming, and such as that. And yet, that's not simply a problem of our generation or problem of the 20th century.

All of church history records this phenomenon. There's a long history of attempts by men to predict the date of the Lord's return, or to find the antichrist in the tyrants of their day. And of course, they always fail. This was brought to my attention years ago when I was a seminary student. It was my first semester, and I was writing a paper on this subject of eschatology. And so I was rummaging through the library at Dallas Seminary trying to find some books on the subject, and I came across one book. It was a small book, a rather old book. It was at least 50 years old at the time, and it was a book that was filled with pictures of men that the author considered likely candidates for the antichrist. Men that were very obscure, I'd never heard of any of them. They were sultans and sheiks from the East, and all of whom had by that time died.

We see those kinds of things periodically, and yet they tend to discredit the study of prophecy, and have caused some Christians to actually shy away from it all together. And yet, I think it's significant to note that the Olivet Discourse is the longest discourse, the longest of our Lord's teachings in the Book of Mark, which

indicates that the Lord placed great value upon this subject of prophecy. In fact, you can't read the Bible without continually coming across this subject of prophecy, much of which has been fulfilled, much of which is yet to be fulfilled. So, the Lord obviously placed a great deal of importance upon the subject of prophecy, on future events, and the apostles certainly supported that emphasis. One of the most practical studies in the Bible is the study of prophecy.

Peter makes that very clear in 2 Peter chapter 3 where he gives an extended description of our Lord's return and the certainty of it. And then, with that certain hope before us, he writes, "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by him in peace, spotless and blameless."

Peter ties our conduct with the hope of our Lord's coming, and he's saying He's going to come, and He's going to find us in some condition. And what's that condition going to be? The knowledge of that, the conviction of that, the certainty of that hope should be a great motivation in the way we live our lives. The Lord does the same here. He makes that connection between our present conduct and our future hope. His words in chapter 13 are filled with exhortations and admonitions on how we are to live in the present.

Because of what will occur in the future, our life today, our life in the present is to be different. We are to be very active, very diligent, to use Peter's term, and very confident. One thing this chapter should do for us is instill within us a sense of confidence in a day of turmoil. And the reason for such confidence is, as Mark presents our Lord, as our Lord presents Himself in this passage, He is presented as Lord of history. He is the one who is complete control of all of these turbulent events, and He is leading them, He is guiding them, He is shepherding history, so to speak, to its appointed end. A triumphant end, when He will return, and He will establish His glorious kingdom.

That, I think is the essence of this chapter in which we will spend the next few weeks in. Well, the Lord has spent a long day in the temple teaching a large crowd of people and answering some hostile questions that had been put to Him by His opponents. And as He was leaving one of His disciples began admiring the beauty of the temple. "Teacher," he said, "behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" It was a magnificent structure. The rabbis said he who has not seen the temple in its full construction has never seen in his life a glorious building.

It was actually Jerusalem's third temple. The first, built by Solomon, was as you know, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Later, it was rebuilt by Zerubbabel after the Jewish people returned from captivity in Babylon. But eventually, that fell into disrepair. And so, Herod the Great renovated it. In fact, he renovated it so completely that he essentially built a whole new temple. And he spared no expense to make it magnificent, to accommodate the large crowds of pilgrims that would come up to Jerusalem for the festivals there, the feast days. He enlarged the courtyard, building a huge platform and retaining wall that towered some 200 feet above the Kidron Valley.

Now, if you know anything about the topography of Jerusalem, you know that the temple was built on Mount Zion. In fact, much of the city is built behind that. And, between Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives which is a bit higher than Mount Zion, there is the Kidron Valley. So, this retaining wall and this platform dominated the Kidron Valley, west of the Mount of Olives. And on the platform and around the temple itself, he built porches and beautiful colonnades, and a series of courtyards that each successively rose in height so that when one got to the center of the temple, to the sanctuary itself, the temple proper, it towered over the rest of the temple complex. The stones of the temple that caused the disciples to marvel so much, were massive.

Josephus records that some measured 25 cubits long, 8 cubits high, 12 cubits wide. This isn't measurement in feet. This is cubits. So, much, much longer than what we would think it would be. Something like 45 feet long and 14 feet high and 12 feet by 22 feet wide. Massive stones. Then Herod embellished the walls with rich ornaments, such as gold vines and grapes that were taller than a man.

When Josephus describes the features of the temple for us, and he writes that the exterior of the temple itself was covered with massive plates of gold. And what wasn't covered with gold was made of white marble. So that when the rays of the sun struck the temple in the morning, the glare was so bright that people couldn't look at it. They had to turn their eyes away. And from a distance, these travelers would be making their way up to Jerusalem, and they could see the temple in the distance. It appeared to be a snow-covered mountain. So, you can see why the rabbis boasted in the temple, and why the disciples were so impressed with it.

But the Lord startles them by saying, yes, the buildings are great. It's all impressive, but it's all coming down. Not one stone shall be left upon another. That's

just what happened. In AD 70, the Roman legions under Titus broke through the city after a long siege, and they destroyed the temple. Some of the massive stones of the outer wall are still standing, and they can be seen in and around the wailing wall. But the temple itself was completely pulled down, and so much so that there's no trace of it left today. In fact, there's scholarly debate as to where it originally stood, because there's no trace of that temple left. I think we have something of a proverb in that. A reminder that God is not impressed with our structures. He's not impressed with our outward forms. We're very much impressed with those things. We're impressed with the buildings we can build, magnificent churches and cathedrals. And I suppose with some validity, they're beautiful. They attract our eye and they impress us. But, what impresses the Lord is what goes on inside the building. He's impressed with the heart, and that's something we've been reminded of in the past few weeks as we've studied through chapter 12. That's what the Lord wants. He wants our heart. Now, I think that when a church builds a building, it should seek to build one that is pleasing to the Lord, that is tasteful, and that reflects something about our view of the Lord. But, as important as that may be, what is really important, was essentially important is what goes on within the building.

What about the heart of the people? And the hearts of the people that occupy the temple were cold, and their worship was cold and formal and indifferent, and that's why it was all coming down. As the Scripture says, man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Well, with verse 3, the scene shifts. The Lord and His disciples have made their way across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. And there, the Lord sits down. As He and His disciples looked across the valley of the temple spread out below them in all of its glory, its massive walls, its magnificent porches and columns, its gold and marble shimmering in the sun. And with that scene filling their eyes and the Lord's prophecy echoing in their ears, they asked a question. They say to Him in verse 4: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"

Mark is the one who tells us that the four disciples who asked the question are Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew. Mark records, or rather Matthew records that they also ask: "And what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?" That's the subject of this discourse. It deals with the temple, the temple that

they marveled at. But the heart of this passage is about the Lord's coming again, and the end of the age and all of the events that preceded. They obviously had the same interests that we have. They wanted to know what the future contained. And evidently thought that the fall of the temple would mark the end of the age and the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth. And they may have anticipated that all of this would happen in their own lifetime. So, they ask this question.

The connection they made between the fall of the temple and the end of the age was partly correct. The destruction of the temple is probably to be understood as a foreshadowing of what would come. It's illustrating the climactic events that will occur before the second coming. And so there is a connection it seems between the destruction of that temple, and what will take place in the future. But, recognizing that they're partly correct, we must also recognize that they were mainly wrong. These disciples were confused in their terminology and the timing of events.

And so, the Lord begins His answer to their questions with some warnings that are intended to correct them and prepare them for the long period of time that will precede His coming and prepare them for things that they weren't expecting. Trials, difficulties that would test their faith.

Don't be misled, He says, for many will come in my name saying, "I am the Christ," and will mislead many. In other words, they weren't to expect His coming in the kingdom to occur anytime soon. But they were to expect men who claim to be the Christ and to come in His authority. They were to expect false messiahs. Jewish history has more than one example of this. One of the most famous examples is that of bar Kokhba, a man who led a revolt against Rome around the year 132. A man who was proclaimed by a great rabbi of that day, Rabbi Akiva, to be the Messiah. In fact, he gave him that name, bar Kokhba, which means "son of the star," and it's taken from a messianic prophecy in Numbers 24:17. "A star shall come forth from Jacob." Rabbi Akiva said this is the Messiah; this is that star.

Well, the Christians in Palestine, which were a considerable community at that time, refused to accept him as the Messiah, as you can imagine, and were persecuted as a result of that. But the Jews followed him, almost wholly and completely, and for them, it all ended in complete disaster, as events such as that always do. We see those events being repeated throughout church history. The Middle Ages and into the

Reformation, there were those who came along and made such claims, and claimed to be the Messiah, and talked about the soon-coming of the Lord.

And of course, the recent events down in Waco fit within that same pattern. Events like that disturb us. they disturb me because I see them happening, and we will continue to see them happening. But you see them happening, and you know that it all reflects badly upon the church, because it casts a shadow upon the true church in the eyes of the world, and they tend to see us all in that same light. And so, it does disturb us, and should.

And yet, it would be even more disturbing if events like that didn't happen. I say that because the Lord is predicting that they would. He says these people are going to come on the scene. And you can expect that. And if that never happened, then what would that say about our Lord's prophecy?

No, all of those events can be something of an encouragement, in the sense that what they do is confirm the truth of what Christ has said. They will come, He says, and you can expect them. And we will expect to see more and more and as time goes by. Fanatics will come, and they will have their followers. Followers who claim to be Christians. But the fact that they followed them shows that they're false believers. And in some ways, that's part of the purpose I suppose. It separates the true from the false. It's a test. The true believer passes the test.

So the Lord says don't be fooled and don't be disturbed. Along with false messiahs, there will be numerous catastrophes. Wars and rumors of wars, nations rising up against nations, famines, earthquakes. All kinds of political and natural disturbances. But, He says, they weren't to be frightened by these things. He says that this is what's going to come. They weren't to conclude from these things that the world was collapsing into chaos, or that God had somehow lost His grip on the events of the world, or that He had forgotten them. We tend to think that, I think. At least, we're tempted to. We look at the things that are going on. You can't turn on the news in the evening, or you can't pick up your paper in the morning without reading about calamities. Either in the city of Dallas, or throughout the nation, or the world. It's every day. I doubt that we've had a newspaper at least in my lifetime that's had a front page that didn't have some catastrophe on it. As we begin to look at those things and evaluate our own situation, we begin to fear for ourselves. We fear for our children and what's going to come in their day when they get older. And all of those things are

proper, but we should never come to the point where we think, that we despair, as though God has lost His grip.

He hasn't lost His grip. As He says, "These things," in verse 7, "must take place." They're all ordained of God. They are part of His plan. They fit within His purpose, and they are reminders to us that He is coming back. So it shouldn't frighten us. And neither, at the same time, should they raise within us false hope. This is what He's telling His disciples. You're going to see these things. Don't be disturbed by them. Don't be frightened. But at the same time, don't get false anticipation or false hope from them. Because, as He goes on to state, they are not yet the end. That is, the end of the age. So, we can't calculate the Lord's return by the calamities that we see around us, or that we watch on the evening news. These are the natural occurrences in a fallen world. This is just the way it is in a world that's under the curse.

In fact, He says these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs, the beginning, the preliminary events. Portents of future events, but just the beginning. And so it would be premature to calculate the end by the occurrences that we see and that he foretells will occur. And yet, the events are significant. The expression "birth pangs" was one carefully chosen by our Lord, because you find it in the Old Testament, and it's used there often of divine judgments, and used because it underscores the nature of divine judgments, that they are painful, that they are distressing, that they are very, very difficult.

Just as the contractions of childbirth signal that the pregnancy is about to issue in birth, so too world disturbances signal that the end is coming. History will give birth to the kingdom of God, and that's the goal of history. That's what we're looking forward to. That's what history is marching toward. Just as a woman who was with child is moving toward that time of birth, so too history is moving toward its great conclusion with Christ's return and His kingdom. And His return will be immediately preceded by great catastrophes on the earth. That's not only something that our Lord teaches, but you can read Paul on the same subject in 1 Thessalonians 5. He describes that.

Great calamities will come upon the earth and they will be painful and they will be distressing, something like a woman experiences when she gives birth to a child. But the events that our Lord is describing here are just the beginning, he says.

They are not the final events, and so the Lord's return can't be determined by these things any more than the moment of a child's birth can be determined by the initial pains of labor that a woman feels.

Let me illustrate that problem from personal experience. I suspect the experience that many of you have had who have children. When you at least, at one time, made a frantic trip to the hospital. It may have been at 2:00 in the morning. Sleep for a while, and maybe you've just fallen asleep and then you get this nudge from your wife. She's felt some labor pains and she says, "I think it's time." So you jump out of bed, and you nervously grab that suitcase that you packed because that's what they told you to do at the class you went to. You rush to the car and you take off, and halfway there you realize you forgot your wife, so you go back and you get her, and you load her up in the car, and you head off to the hospital. And you get there, only to find that it's all premature. That was a false alarm. So you go back home and you, a little disappointed, or maybe a little relieved depending on how you are reacting, and then you try to get back to sleep, and the next day, you're wondering if it's going to happen again.

And it may. Because we can't predict with accuracy the exact moment of birth from the labor pains. The pregnancy is real. The pain is real. The birth will occur, but it will be some time off. I think we can say the same about the labor pains, the birth pangs, of the world in which we're living now. It tells us something. It tells us that yes, that day is coming. Things are not as they should be, and the kingdom will come and Christ will come, but we can't precisely date it by the things that are going on. And they couldn't do it in the first century. And yet, the first century was filled with these disturbances. Wars that decimated Palestine, civil war that shook the Roman Empire in the year 69. Earthquakes in Asia Minor, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius that destroyed Pompeii, severe famines during the reigns of Claudius and Nero. All of that, and yet the end didn't come.

And so it continues down to our day. In our own country, we witness these kinds of things with the calamities. On the East Coast with the droughts that they are experiencing, or the floods along the Mississippi, or the earthquakes in California. I think there was one just this past week. Hurricanes, tornadoes. All of these things occur all over the world, continually. The Cold War has ended, but wars haven't.

You can look at a map, and almost every continent of the world, there is war of one kind or another. There are disasters, natural and political, of one kind or another.

But these things don't signal that the end is upon us. They do, however, remind us that the end will come and they should cause us to think about that, and they should cause us to look forward to the Lord. They should tell us that the world is not as it should be. It needs to be corrected. That correction will come with our Lord and His kingdom.

So, there's a warning here to the disciples, a warning not to misinterpret people and their claims, not to misinterpret events. So, a warning not to be misled, not to be naïve about what's going on. And that involves the need to be wise, the need to be discerning. They need to be discerning, but they also need to be ready, He says. They need to be strong because they would also experience personal hardship.

Verse 9. "But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them." Now, I don't think they were hoping for the soon coming of the kingdom, and now He's telling them things that they really weren't wanting to hear, and probably weren't expecting to hear. And yet, that's exactly what did happen soon after our Lord's resurrection and ascension. You can read them in the early chapters of the Book of Acts. Just look at Acts chapters 4 and 5 and you see Peter and John in the temple, preaching the gospel, and the authorities finding out about it, and they arrest them. They arraign them, they bring them in on more than one occasion. They warn them not to do that any more, but Peter says that they must obey God rather than men.

And as a result, they are later beaten. Peter's imprisoned. So it goes with many of the apostles. All of the apostles for that matter, and members of the church. Paul fulfills this in an unusual way. First, as a persecutor of the church, and then as the persecuted. He was beaten in the synagogues, he writes, five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. He stood before the Jewish authorities. He was imprisoned. He stood before the Gentile authorities, stood before the governors Felix and Festus. He stood before King Agrippa. Stood before Caesar himself. And all of this, our Lord says, would occur, did occur, will occur, for His name's sake, for His sake, as an opportunity to witness for Him and the apostles did that.

You can read Paul's great testimony before Agrippa and Berenice, his queen in Acts 26. Magnificent passage and scene. All of the pomp and all of the royal authority is quite a spectacle. And then they lead in with all of these dignitaries, kings, and governors, and military people. They lead in this small man, bound in chains, and ask him to explain himself. And he does. And as he stands there, he gives, he concludes his description of the gospel and his explanation of why he's in prison with an impassioned plea to the king: "I would to God, not only you, but all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains."

And so it goes down through history. Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, standing before the Emperor Charles the V with his dukes and princes along with the bishops and the scholars and the popes, representatives. There was all the pomp and brilliance of worldly power in that court when Luther made what has been called the speech that shook the world, and declared: "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And men will continue to make stands for the gospels because the Lord says in verse 10, "This first." That is, before the end comes, the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. That's God's will. That's the great commission that He's referring to. The Lord seems to be saying here, instead of looking at signs of the end, preach the gospel of salvation. He's not saying don't look at signs, because He gives signs, and He gives more signs. He gives some very precise signs that are yet to come in verses 14 and following. So, He's not saying don't look at signs, but it does seem as though He's saying, "Don't worry so much about the signs; you be about the business of preaching the gospel, spreading the gospel throughout the world," because that is what must take place and will take place before the end comes.

So that's what we're to be doing. We're to be out there proclaiming the gospel, and if we do that, we will make our stand as well, and we'll stand before kings and princes. The kings may be a boss at work, maybe someone in the neighborhood. But if we are walking with the Lord, we are living in obedience to Him, and we will make those same kinds of stands. That can be a little unsettling. But the Lord offers great encouragement in verse 11. In fact, one of the most encouraging statements you will find in the Scriptures is what He says when He says, when these things happen, in fact when the worst happens, and you are arrested and stand before the authorities, don't be anxious about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. In other words, what He's saying to

them is: I'm sending you on a mission. You are my ambassadors to the world. And you're going to be doing My work, and I'm not going to desert you. I'm not going to forsake you. You will have all of the authority and all of the power of heaven itself behind you. Because through the Holy Spirit, who is in your heart, and who has sealed you for eternity, you will have through Him, power and ability that is not natural to you.

That's typical of the Christian life. We are called to a supernatural life. It is not a normal life that we lead. We are not called to live on a little higher plane than the world, to just be better people. We have been brought into whole new life. We have been regenerated. We are new creatures. We have new standing with God. We have a new relationship with Him, and it's a supernatural relationship. We have the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, within us, communicating the mind of Christ and the power of Christ to us.

So, we lead a supernatural life, and this is the great encouragement that He gives, that through the Holy Spirit, in difficult times, in unsettling times, He will give us both the ability to say the right thing and to say it at the right time.

Now, this shouldn't be misconstrued to suggest that a lack of study and preparation is being urged by our Lord. There are people of that persuasion, as you know, who feel that preparation and study really are obstacles to the work of the Spirit, that He wants these empty vessels, and He just communicates through us, the less we know the better it is. That's not what the Lord is saying. In fact, you can't find that anywhere in the New Testament. Scriptures, over and over again, in one way or another, tell us to study to show ourselves approved. We are to be a people that know the word. We have to heed the commandment of Peter to always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that's in us.

How can we do that if we don't know the word? We've got to know the Scriptures. And strictly speaking, this statement that our Lord is making here doesn't refer to teaching. It doesn't refer to evangelism, but to persecution, and being called upon either unexpectedly or under intense pressure to make a defense of the faith.

When that happens, the Lord promises not to forsake us, to make provision. And so, when Peter was brought before the Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 4 and compelled to explain himself, Luke writes that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He had supernatural enablement to do what he was to do, and he did that when he spoke.

And when he spoke, Luke writes, that they marveled at the confidence of Peter and John because they understood that they were uneducated and untrained. Not unknowledgeable in the Scriptures. That means they weren't trained in their schools, in the schools they had accredited, but they were certainly trained. They had spent three years with the Lord, being taught of Him, and that's far better than any seminary education that one could have in that day or in our day, for that matter. They were men who knew the Bible.

But these priests and Pharisees recognized in these simple fishermen something uncommon. This was a changed Peter standing before them. The same Peter who not very much earlier fled from authorities and denied the Lord three times. And now he's standing there boldly, explaining the faith articulately. So, persecution becomes a time for testimony.

But that doesn't minimize the seriousness of persecution. In fact, the Lord explains in verses 12 and 13 that events will become so severe that families and friends will be turned against each other. Verse 12. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name." Now, all of that may have come as something of a surprise to the disciples, but it shouldn't because it fits with the things that the Lord had said earlier. Earlier, He had told them that part of being a disciple involved taking up their cross and following Him.

Then He warns them in that same passage in Mark 8. that "whoever is ashamed of Me, the Son of man, will also be ashamed of him when He comes in glory." That says a lot about the Christian life, and the Christian life is a life that doesn't allow for compromise. We live in an age of compromise. It's all around us. We're encouraged to compromise. From the political realm, the business realm, to just life in general. We live in a compromising age.

And yet, the faith doesn't allow for that. It calls for commitment. Commitment even to the point where families will be divided over these truths. And many families in the early church were divided. Jews were excommunicated from their synagogues, which may not seem like a big deal to us, but it was to them because their whole life revolved around the synagogue. if they were put out of the synagogue, they were put out of their families, and those kind of things happened

among the Jews, and also among the Gentiles. There were divisions among the Gentile converts as well.

When Emperor Domitian persecuted the church in the latter part of the first century, he didn't spare his own family. The gospel had penetrated into the house of Caesar as well, and he persecuted his cousin Domitilla and her husband because they had come to faith. This was a couple that was very close to him because he had chosen their children to be his heirs. Yet, he persecuted even them. It's no different than our day. We don't suffer the sword as they did in the early church and as Christians have done throughout history. In fact, as many even do today in other parts of the world. But, we do suffer these same kinds of divisions. And there are people, men and women in our own church who worship here with us who are not here with their spouse because there's a lack of faith there. The partner doesn't believe and may even be hostile.

That's a very hard situation, I think. And yet, if there's any encouragement, and there should be encouragement, it's this: that the Lord knows your situation. He's not unaware of that difficulty. Now, He knew it Himself because as you remember, His brothers didn't believe in Him and taunted Him on more than one occasion about that. He knew what that situation is like. In fact, He stood alone in His family; even His mother, Mary, was puzzled over Him. He knows the situation. He's foretold that situation right here, and has placed you, if that is your situation, in that circumstance, to be a witness for Him.

Well, that's the situation you're in. And in fact, that's the situation that the world has been in from the beginning, since Cain slew Abel. Why did he slay him? He slew him because of his faith. And so it has gone down through history. There has been a cleavage in mankind, a separation between those of faith and those of unbelief. And so, the disciples could expect this. You will be hated by all on account of My name. That is because of our connection with Him, our identification with Him. As one writer puts it: "Not all that the world hates is good Christianity, but it does hate good Christianity and always will. Christ divides men and we can expect life in this inter-advent age, this age before our Lord's return, to be filled with difficulties and hardships.

And not everyone will stand the test. And so, the Lord calls for perseverance; in the face of the world's hatred, He says, it is the one who has endured to the end who

will be saved. And in saying that, He is encouraging His disciples, encouraging all of us to endure, to persevere to the end.

Now, He's not advocating a salvation by works. Nor is He suggesting that a genuine believer can lose his or her salvation. But He is saying that trials are coming and trials will be very hard and will test the genuineness of a person's faith. And what is not genuine will fail. It's the same principle that we find in the parable of the soils, of the seed that falls on the good ground that is the gospel that penetrates into the heart, that is prepared. The heart that's been regenerated. That heart will seize the gospel, and the gospel takes root in that heart, and it stands against the trials and the difficulties. That doesn't mean it doesn't fail at times, but it perseveres, it stands, whereas the seed that falls on the shallow soil doesn't take root in the heart.

And when trials come and difficulties come, the person who doesn't have genuine faith, doesn't stand up under the trials, and in the end, abandons the faith. Perseverance is continuance in the faith. It's not sinlessness. Christians sin every day. We fail every day. Peter was a great example of that. He failed miserably before the Lord in times of great trial. The final test of salvation is continuance in faith. Not profession of faith, continuance in faith. Profession of faith is, of course, necessary. But then Judas professed faith until he finally abandoned our Lord and abandoned his pretense of faith. The ultimate test is continual faith, because genuine faith issues in perseverance. Genuine faith continues to believe to the very end.

And all of God's elect will persevere because God causes them to persevere. The perseverance of the saints really means the perseverance of God with the saints. Or as some like to say, the preservation of the saints. It's a work of God; it's a work of His grace, and we see it throughout the Scriptures. Maybe not in those exact words, but you certainly have the teaching. Philippians chapter 1 verse 6, Paul writes, He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Now, when does He begin that work? He begins with regeneration and faith. And Paul is saying: He will complete it. He won't abandon that work. He cannot fail in that work. And then He goes on in that same epistle to state that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Press on. Be faithful for, and here's the reason that you and I can do that, it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

So God's at work within us. All believers in Christ are sealed with the Holy Spirit, as the pledge, as Paul describes Him in Ephesians 1. Pledge of our future inheritance. And so, we are kept by Him, by God's grace, Christians do persevere. The church does and it will endure to the end. One of the great evidences of that outside of Scripture is the history of the church itself. And as we study that history, we see that it's filled with persecution, filled with difficulty. The very thing that our Lord is predicting here. And yet, through all of that, the church did not fail but grew stronger.

It was Tertullian who, in the second century, told the pagans: all your ingenious cruelties can accomplish nothing. The blood of the Christians is the seed of the church. Persecution has just made the church grow, and it was growing. And he goes on in his apology to declare to the empire that very fact. He says, "We are a people of yesterday. And yet, we have filled every place belonging to you. Cities, islands, castles, palace, senate, forum. We leave you your temples only." The gospel spread rapidly in those early centuries in spite of opposition and hardship, and one reason is: those early Christians had the conviction that Jesus is Lord of history. His hand is upon all of the events, the most troubling of events. He's in control of these things, and He's moving everything toward their certain hope, that hope which they embrace so fervently, the hope of our Lord's return. That was a great motivation to them.

As Peter wrote, therefore beloved, since you looked for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless. That's what we're to be doing. If He were to come today, how would He find us? Would He find us diligent? Would He find us spotless and blameless? Are you looking for Him? That's a question we all need to be asking ourselves. Are we looking for these things? Are we looking for our Lord's return?

History will conclude with His triumphant reign. Will you be part of that glorious kingdom that's to come? You will if you've put your faith in Him as Savior. And if you've put your faith in Him as Savior, if you recognize your need of a Savior, that you are a sinner and you have trusted in Him as the Savior, then you have a place in that kingdom. Your citizenship is in heaven. It is reserved there for you. It can never be erased. You can never fall from His grace. You can never be taken out of that relationship if you believed in Him.

If you haven't, if you sit here this morning and you don't know Christ as your Savior, if you've never trusted in Him, if you've never sensed that you are in need of a Savior, that you're a sinner, then I urge you: look to Him. Trust in Him as the one who died in your place, the one who bore the penalty of sin on your behalf. Trust in Him. Receive the forgiveness of sins, which is freely given to all who believe, and enter into that heavenly citizenship of the kingdom to come. May God help you to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great truths that we see before us in this passage. There will be difficult times that will come, that have come, and that will yet come in our life, Father, but we have the conviction, the confidence that You are in control. This is part of Your plan. These things must come. They will get worse as we see in this passage. Terrible times and affliction will come upon the earth. And yet, all of that has within it the hope of the end, which is glorious. Help us, Father, to look with confidence to that end, to live our lives in light of what is coming, to not live for the moment but to live for eternity, and to live our lives in a way in which we do store up treasures in Him. Bless us with this kind of perspective. We thank You Father for the gift of Your Son and the life that's in Him and the future that has been purchased for all of us who put our faith in Him. Help us to live lives that are pleasing to You. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.