

In chapter 12 Jesus gave a lot of public teaching. Most of it was focused on the hypocrisy and emptiness of the religious leaders on one hand, and instructing his disciples on what it means to follow him, by having eyes that listen and understand and hearts that obey his words. Sadly, the ministry in the temple had no power to regenerate or transform hearts. As Jesus concluded his teaching he was going out of the temple, the disciples were enthralled with the imposing magnificence of this building, and it was magnificent. But Jesus was not so enthralled.

The temple outwardly was beautiful and spectacular. Yet inwardly it had become a place of business. People used it for making money. Leaders who ran it cared more for themselves than about the need of others. Instead of believing in the Messiah they schemed and plotted to kill Him. This is what happens when people try to bridge their own way to God. They strive for doing good deeds, but end up falling short because they have no real relationship with God. This temple which the people so revered would be completely destroyed and this destruction was one of the most catastrophic in all of Jewish history.

The disciples asked Jesus for the signs that this would be fulfilled. It seems that their question when “all these things” are going to be fulfilled refers to Jesus’ second coming, which would be the culmination of all these things. Jesus lists out many signs. Because Jesus describes the first of these signs as the beginning of birth pangs, we can conclude that this period of turmoil in world history started all the way back and will merely increase until Jesus’ second coming. Just like a woman might experience some birth pangs weeks before her baby is born. That is very much what these signs are like. Basically, they last from the beginning of the time of Jesus’ first coming until the end of it right before Jesus’ second coming. Let’s take a look at some of the signs.

Many will come in my name saying “I am He.” Ever since Jesus’ ascension this has been true. Many false prophets and Christ’s have come and made claims and tried to get a following. It is still happening today in cults across the world. Wars and rumours of wars. These point to the instability of this world. Nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom. This has happened throughout the history of the world. Wars occurred on a global scale never seen before. Earthquakes and famines. These things again show instability and the need for divine intervention. These signs show us that the pride of man which has caused us to believe we can do anything is ill-placed.

What do we learn from this? See to it that no one misleads you. We must be wary. The world is filled with false teachers seeking to lead people astray for their own benefit. Do not believe them, Jesus warns. These are merely the signs. Generally speaking these things tell us that the world is unstable and Jesus will return. And these signs will increase prior to Jesus’ return. We must be ready. I believe that this is the most important principle Jesus wants us to get from this. His coming is imminent. It could be at any time. These signs are happening so that we would always be reminded that he is coming back to set all of this right. And so, the question stands. Are we awake and ready?

Jesus then continues to warn us as he says to the disciples, be on your guard. The world in general is not going to be an easy place. There will be insecurity, turmoil, unrest, wars, natural disasters, and famines. Beyond those things, believers are going to face persecution. Jesus wants us to be prepared. The church is going to experience persecution and lots of it. Like the signs listed through verse 8, it is always there, and in general it will increase until Christ returns as the battle of good and evil reaches its climax. Therefore, as disciples we are to continue to bear witness and be a good testimony. Believers should take persecution as an opportunity to let the light of Christ shine in the dark. We are to learn that persecution is an opportunity to show the love, patience, gentleness, and forgiveness of Christ. Persecution is to be expected. How we react to it is what is important.

Jesus continues on to say that the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. What can we do about all of this persecution, turmoil, and unrest? The only thing we can do is to help see this verse fulfilled and in essence, speed the return of Christ. How can we help achieve this? Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will lead you out of such persecution. This is what Jesus wants for believers. It's not so much about saying the exact right words as it is about relying on Christ and having a close relationship with him. We need to be willing to submit ourselves and our situation into his hand, pray for guidance, and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. So, we prepare by building up our relationship with Christ, by building up our faith and confidence in him.

Jesus then continues on, brother will betray brother. Persecution will come even from the most surprising places. Even family members will turn against their own. Our ties to Christ are stronger than our ties to blood. You will be hated by all. This verse shows the depth of emotion against believers. It is not a casual dislike, but an intense and deep hatred. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. The perseverance of the saints is a biblical concept taught throughout Scripture which tells us that real believers will follow Christ to the end no matter what trials they face.

Then Jesus told the disciples about this, the abomination of desolation. There is much debate on what this is and when it occurs. Something terribly unclean and pagan will corrupt what is supposed to be a holy place to worship God. It is best, perhaps, to understand these words of Jesus both as an historical reference and also as having a final fulfilment. This is consistent with the apocalyptic and eschatological nature of Mark 13. The prophetic tradition often speaks of both the short-term future and of the end of time. Thus, for us, regardless of how first century events may have fulfilled Jesus' words, there is still a fulfilment to come. Our lack of knowledge about how and when requires us to be alert, to watch and wait. What exactly it will be remains to be seen, but the phrase "You will know it when you see it" probably holds true.

We are yet again, warned of many false prophets and christs. Throughout history there have always been many false teachers. During these end times these will increase exponentially. Their goal is to mislead people, to lead them astray. These false prophets are clearly under the influence of Satan to spread his own propaganda of hate and rebellion. These false prophets will perform signs and wonders intended to deceive. We are warned not to believe people because of their

smooth words or even an apparent miracle they did.

Then this section closes with another warning which is equally important for us as it was for the disciples. We have no excuse for Jesus told us these things ahead of time. We have no excuse to be led astray by others. God has given us everything we need to test who is speaking the truth and who is not. His word is more than adequate. Therefore, we must heed his word and we must abide in him as He abides in us and must not allow ourselves to be deceived.

May the grace and peace of God be with us all.

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