

Not You But The Spirit

Today's passage follows a concentrated account of Jesus teaching in the temple



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complex, warning about the scribes who are protective of their social prominence, and focusing on religious legalism – contrasted with the scene of a poor widow whose offering of a “penny” at the Temple treasury is a symbol of all

she possesses (Mk. 12:35-44). Keep in mind the chapter and verse designations we know did not exist for the original readers.

Mark contrasts some of Jesus' most powerful teachings with the emptiness of the religious establishment and their adoration of the temple (Mk. 13:1-2). Jesus reaches back to King David to declare his identity: “David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, till I put my enemies under thy feet’” (Mk. 12:36). The contrast is startling, that not one of the temple's great stones will be left standing when God's Messiah appears! (13:2).

Our focal text begins with Jesus and four of his closest disciples sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking westward to a clear view of the temple complex in Jerusalem. Peter, James, John, and Andrew want to know when the temple will be destroyed and what will be the warning signs? (13:4).

Jesus' answer is both troubling and exhilarating for those disciples, who, like us, were looking for a calendar of events leading up to the Messiah coming in power to call the world to account and reign as Lord over all. Biblical prophecy speaks to its immediate circumstance, but it also speaks to God's ultimate purpose.

For instance, Jesus' teachings that day were literally fulfilled forty years later when Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian, led an army that crushed an ill-conceived Jewish uprising against Rome and leveled the temple and Jerusalem. We suspect that Mark's vision of the coming persecution the early church would endure was influenced by what he witnessed in those dark days, beginning

with Emperor Nero.

In the ensuing centuries many Christians referenced this text to teach that Jesus would return in their lifetime. But Jesus' teaching was not a mysterious chronology of the “second coming.” Jesus words were preparatory, an honest call to faithfulness in this world so long as we have time. We make the same mistake as some of those early believers when we interpret John's “Revelation” as a road map of Jesus' return. Ours is not to know the moment, but to live as God's grace people every day.

We are told to “beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me (Jesus)” (v. 9). History repeats the truth of those words for every generation. Don't miss Jesus' unchanging commission: “the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations” (v. 10). Read the book of Acts to see how quickly Jesus' words became real. Persecution was harsh, but, against all odds, the church spread across the Roman Empire.

In the meantime, the world will challenge the followers of Jesus as it did in the first century. The Savior gives us guidance that in the face of this world's challenges “do not worry beforehand” (v. 11). You know how anxiety can paralyze you when situations are difficult at work, you face financial stress, or when the news shows the world coming apart. Our nation is currently going through a very unsettling political time, lying seems to be the norm, and religious voices have appeared in the midst of government rhetoric, racism and gender issues that continue to divide us.

It is not easy to actually live by the words and example of Jesus. Our calling is not to silence the enemies of truth, not to resolve every problem, not to point out who deserves to go you-know-where, but to live as a Christian. Anxiety takes our focus away from Christ and his teachings, so the answer is to remember that when you speak, the Holy Spirit is your guide and strength (v. 11). That is not advice to “wing it” but a reminder that when you love God, have been changed by his grace, and seek his way, the Holy Spirit

will shape your intentions and words. The center of God's will is not defined by your theological prowess but by your trust in God. Do not forget, “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (v. 13).

The human perspective is that we buy something and own it; we finish a job assignment and it is done. Life is compartmentalized; it is like a checklist. But life and faith are not like that. We grow, change, learn, discover, struggle, fail, and succeed because life is a process.

Jesus' encouraging words confront life's harsh realities: “brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name” (v. 13). These are wrenching possibilities that occurred in that world and still occur today in ours. “Endure” is the word here, but do not translate it as “give up and surrender to the worst.” Keep on! You already know the outcome. Christ is risen. The plan and purpose of God cannot be defeated.

Dr. June Kean was my church organist and a dear friend for years. June was not only a gifted organist, but a powerful prayer warrior and vibrant witness for Christ. Years ago, she returned from a concert tour in Europe that included East Germany with this prophetic message: the Christians of East Germany are fervently praying for freedom from Russian domination. She said their faith in the darkness of oppression was electrifying. June was right and those prayers were answered within a couple of years. Endurance is not just holding on in the Christian life, it is acting in faith, loving as Christ loves, showing others the hope of God's grace.

Every day is a new beginning with possibilities that God can transform into blessings and joy. You have a choice: live as a follower of Christ, or let the world decide how you feel and act. Remember you are never alone; the Holy Spirit is your faithful companion. Pray for the witness of Christ to influence our nation, leaders, and world. Life is a challenge, but with God's Spirit as your companion you can overcome and become a voice for God's love.