

“The One Who Endures to the End Will Be Saved”

Mark 13:1-13

As I mentioned last week, we are in this mini season at the end of the church year calendar where we turn our attention to the end times, the coming of Christ. Next Sunday is the final Sunday of the Church Year and we will read the second half of Mark chapter 13. When reading Jesus’ answer to His disciples question “when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”; when reading Jesus’ reply, it is important to understand that He is answering two questions.

Next week, when we read the rest of Mark 13, we will hear what Jesus says in regard to the End Times. But in what we read today, Jesus is not talking about the end of the world, He is telling of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The disciples, in addition to debating amongst themselves which of them were the greatest, they also were pretty sure that Jesus was going to establish the kingdom of David there in Jerusalem. They were ready to pick out their corner offices in the “great buildings” there on Mt. Zion.

Jesus says, “Do you see these great buildings?” Not one stone will be left upon another. This place will be ruined, destroyed. In Matthew’s account, he records more detail of what Jesus says and how terrible it will be – how everyone, even nursing mothers, will be forced to flee the city. He says, “Pray your flight will not be in winter.”

How bad did it get? The Romans cut down every tree in a six mile radius around the city. They laid siege to the city to starve out the Jews. In the end, the Zealots who had led the rebellion used the Temple itself as their fortress to make

their final stand. They fight for freedom in the name of God by desecrating the Temple that bears the name of God.

This is how the faithful are led astray. Jesus says, “See to it that no one leads you astray. Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He.’” Throughout the years, there have been a few individuals make the claim that they are the new Messiah (Waco, Jonestown, and others). But the sort of blasphemy that is most often seen and most often heard is in the subtleties of false teaching. Jesus says, “They will lead many astray.” He is not talking about a handful of people in Waco, TX.

Satan likes to be subtle. He likes to work behind the scenes and make you think (like the Zealots in Jerusalem) that you are doing the work of the Lord. And Satan likes to fish with a big net. Unfortunately, Jesus predicts that Satan and his false teachers will be successful in leading many astray.

Throughout this week, it seemed like everything I read or viewed online had to do with how the underlying philosophies of our day have changed the way people think. How they think about God, about themselves, about truth, and even about words. I am sure you have all heard of Post-Modern philosophy and how it has ruined our culture – and it has. Post-Modernism is filled with many evils. The worst of them that is at the heart of the problem and has spilled over into other thought patterns is called Nihilism.

The name Nihilism comes from the Latin word nihil, which means “nothing.” Nihilism is the belief that life is without meaning, purpose, or any value in and of itself. A nihilist sees no need to believe in a loving God who created a world for His children. And most certainly he sees no need for a God to send His only-begotten Son to die on a cross for the guilt of our sin, because, according to their understanding, there is no such thing as guilt or sin. If something is wrong, that would require the reality that there is something which is right, or correct, or full of

truth – and therefore full of meaning and value. The nihilist says there is no meaning or purpose or value so there cannot be a God full of truth.

And if there is no God full of truth, then there is no Law of God. There is no truth or right or wrong so I can do as I please because my opinion is just as valid as your opinion, therefore you cannot tell me that I am wrong even if I tell you that the sky is purple and $2+2=10$. At its extreme, you have the person who is completely self-absorbed and doesn't care if he hurts anyone else. And there are more and more of them every day. "If it makes me happy, I'm going to do it."

That is called hedonism. You will find that a lot of "ism's" go together. Thankfully, for the sake of society, most of those raised in this post-modern world fall into what we would call "ethical hedonism" – "As long as it doesn't hurt someone else, if it makes me happy, I have the right to do it." "It's my body, I can do with it what I please."

Another hallmark of this thinking is the rejection of authority. My opinion is always valid says the post-modernist. If I say $2+2=10$ and you have a different opinion, who are you to say that I am wrong? I know it seems unbelievable that people think this way, but this is the underlying philosophy that influences our culture and is why people think the way they do about lots of things but particularly about Christ and His church.

If my personal opinion is always valid and there is no such thing as absolute truth, then my opinion becomes my truth. And like all who hold truth to be sacred, my opinion becomes so intertwined with who I am as a person that I would then view any challenge to my opinion as a challenge or attack on me, on my person. This is why we don't have civil discourse anymore.

This is why I don't debate people in the comment lines on Facebook. I have been unfriended more than once, and one time by someone who was seeking my opinion on an issue. The reality is that they wanted affirmation of their own opinion, and I couldn't give that to them because they were outside of

the truth of the Word of God. But they refuse to give up their closely held opinion. Their opinion is their “truth.”

This is why I don’t watch political talk shows very often. They don’t debate. They follow the advice of Frederick Nietzsche, the father of post-modern philosophy, and they exercise what he called “The Will to Power.” So that I can crush you and your opinion, I will not argue the truth (because “there is no truth, there is only opinion” – by the way, that is a quote from Nietzsche himself), I will shout you down and exercise the strength of my will. We have seen a lot of video of that this week in the news.

Try preaching the truth of God’s Law and Gospel to a culture where a large segment sees no meaning, purpose, or value in life other than the seeking of personal pleasure. And most of the rest of the people have the underlying belief that their personal opinion is the truth and they have little desire to listen to the Word of God if there is a different reality presented as the truth.

Jesus says, “Many will come in My name, saying, “I am He.” The person who says that they have the authority to sit in judgment of the Word of God and say that their opinion is greater than the Word of God – that person is declaring themselves to be at least equal to God. “I am He.”

This is the struggle we, as the church, face. Like the church established by the apostles, we are in the minority. Is this just part of the ebb and flow of life in the church throughout history, or is this the beginnings of birth pains leading to the end, as Jesus says?

Jesus tells His disciples what needs to be done: “do not be alarmed. This must take place . . . be on your guard . . . bear witness, because the Gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations . . . don’t be surprised when you are hated by everyone on account of the name of Jesus Christ. (How bad is it going to get? It is going to get bad just like it did in 70 AD.) But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Amen.