

## ***“Enduring to the End”***

As Jesus and His disciples turn around to look at the magnificent Temple and its surrounding buildings – He reveals some very disturbing news. “Do you see these great buildings?”, He asks, “There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

I’m sure the significance of His words began to sink in as the disciples crossed the Kidron Valley and sat down with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. Like a jewel set high above the city of Jerusalem – the Temple held great significance for God’s people – and its destruction would raise many questions.

The Temple was the center of worship – where God dwelt in the midst of His people. There, God promised to atone for sin through the sacrifices offered on the altar. The people of God gathered in the courtyards to hear and study God’s Word.

Can you imagine the bricks of this building being thrown down – this church being destroyed, not by fire, or a tornado – but by the enemies of the Gospel? Let that sink in for a moment.

When will this take place, and what will the sign when all of this is about to take place? That’s what the disciples want to know. Christ’s response is interesting. He doesn’t give them a date, a timetable.

He says, “See that no one leads you astray.” Many will try to do just that – to lead you away from the Lord, His presence, and His work in the midst of you. How? By claiming, “I am He” – claiming to be the Christ, the Redeemer, your Savior.

In the Garden of Eden the devil’s temptation was – listen to me and my words – and you will be like God. In the wilderness, and on the cross – listen to me, Jesus – save yourself.

The devil and his temptations – the signs which show what happens when you follow his word – the chaos of wars, earthquakes, and famines – are all around. But “the end is not yet.”

“Be on your guard,” Jesus warns His disciples – those sitting on the Mount of Olives – and those sitting here today. You will be tempted. Many will come in His name – pretending to be God – promising all kinds of salvation, but delivering only destruction.

You will be persecuted – “for my sake,” Jesus says – because of Him, because of His words, because of the Gospel. It’s hard to imagine this building being destroyed – and it’s hard to imagine that you will be delivered over to councils, beaten, and put on trial – but do not turn a deaf ear to His warning.

The Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed some 40 years after Jesus spoke these words. Not only was Jesus delivered over and put on trial – His disciples were persecuted, handed over, and most of them put to death – on His account.

Jesus has more words of warning for us in Mark’s Gospel, preparing us for living in these last days, and for the Last Day. He warns us of dramatic things – but remember that the devil is often very subtle with the chaos that he brings.

One example is the chaos of this world-wide pandemic. At such times, Jesus exhorts us to be on guard – to stand firm – to beware that we are not led astray – even as we face persecution.

The impact of the pandemic, and even the mandates of the governing authorities – on the church – has been great. God’s people are told not to gather together – not to sing His praises – not to receive the Lord’s Supper.

Again, and again we are told to “listen to me” – even when it contradicts Christ and His mandates, His words. This is why it is so important for God’s people to hear His Word – for His sheep to know the voice of the Good Shepherd Jesus, and to follow Him. Hearing His Word, and believing – are vital, especially in the fog of war, and the chaos of these last days.

Jesus speaks of the chaos that erupts within families as well – and as you have no doubt experienced, in one degree or another – the pandemic (and the response to the pandemic) has caused division in your family.

But what does Jesus say? “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.”

For your sake, for the sake of your family, and for the sake of the whole world – the Holy Spirit is at work to proclaim the truth of God and His Word – so you may have refuge in chaos – and life, even as the world comes to an end.

Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will help you. “But the Helper,” He says, “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (St. John 14:26)

Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word, to unite you by faith with Jesus, and reconcile you to the Father. The Holy Spirit reminds you that Jesus is with you always, even unto the end of the age – that His blood cleanses you from all unrighteousness – that your salvation is secured, “It is finished.”

Yes, you will live in the midst of chaos – but His promises are true – and “the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

Like the disciples sitting with Jesus on the Mount of Olives – we too live in the last days. Buildings, and preachers, come and go – but the Word of the Lord endures forever – Christ Himself with you, and “for you.”

So, let us encourage one another in these days – “and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Heb. 10:25) Christ your Savior nourishes you this day with His very own Body and Blood. He rules over all things for your good. And by His Word, He leads you through this world to your eternal home, where you shall live with Him and the Father and the Spirit, without end. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.